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THE PEACOCKS' PLEASAUNCE

By
E. V. B.



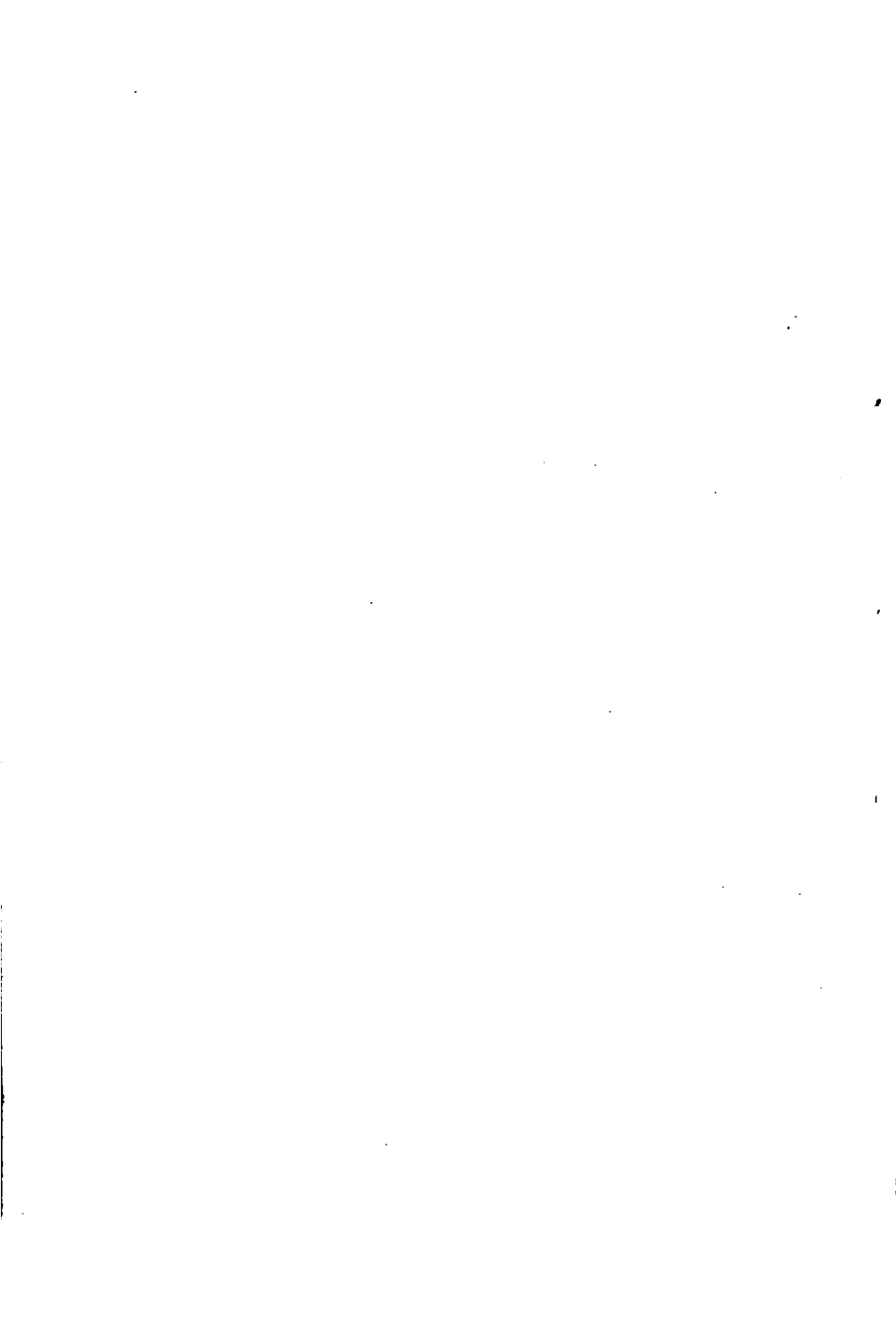




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THE PEACOCK'S PLEASAUNCE



THE PEACOCK'S PLEASAUNCE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

**SEVEN GARDENS AND
A PALACE**

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
**ARTHUR GORDON AND
F. L. B. GRIGGS**

Crown 8vo



SO SWEET THE HOURS OF FAIRYLAND! SO SAD IS STERN REALITY

THE PEACOCK'S PLEASAUNCE

BY
"E. V. B."

WITH EIGHT FULL-
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A Peacock's Prologue

IN the Middle Ages, and in far older times,—in the days of the earliest Christians,—the Peacock is understood as a symbol of Eternity, of Immortality. In the Catacombs at Rome there remains a faded fresco, or mosaic, in which are represented two peacocks, standing at the head and at the foot, of the tomb where lies "*CORNELIVS MARTYR.*" No other epitaph; only this sign—the Argus of a hundred eyes: bird of the hundred glories of silver or of gold.

Immortality: Eternity: it is enough. To be immortal is to be never perishing. It means living, abiding, enduring for ever.

Thus also, in our own day, Burne-Jones, when he made the marble monument for a greatly beloved lady, turned aside from common usage in such matters, and carved a green laurel breaking up through the stones of a tomb, and a Peacock sitting in the branches with his long length of

v

A Peacock's Prologue

drooping plumes. . . . And the World, vaguely wondering, glanced at the monument and passed on, regardless of the Master's meaning.

After this, it is chilling as a frost in June, to be told that it was the fabled incorruptibility of the peacock's flesh, that caused the bird to be considered an emblem of the Resurrection!

The Peacock is the royal emblem of Burma, whose kings traced their descent from the sun: and the Burmese use it as a conventional finial, carved in wood, to ornament the roofs of their dwelling-houses.

Throughout unnumbered cycles of the sun,—in India, and amid all other ancient lands of the shining, changeless East, the Peacock is held sacred:—the mythic symbol of the Peacock existed, and exists.

But the full meaning of it, at least in Burma, is esoteric. It is secret; imparted only to a small and select number. Can this be the reason why we seem to understand so little?

The White Peacock,—more especially in countries where the glory of the sun is great,—is always I believe the most ideally beautiful of the two varieties; and chiefly when his pure white plumes stand up around him arrayed like a circle of the milky way,

A Peacock's Prologue

glittering with every movement—a galaxy of silver stars.

The likeness or image of a Peacock, (white ones taken from the life) has been chosen to enliven here and there a few of these pages.

The mystery still clinging around a creature so resplendent in its beauty, and of a race so ancient, may perhaps be felt to be in keeping with a sense of things but little present to the mind of many: things often lost in a world filled with hurry and the rush of larger interests.

With some, we know there is most surely a sense of sympathy with the inner spirit of Nature as perceived in the last and least, or in the greatest,—with the strangeness or the wonder or the beauty, or as at times the pathos. The feeling is born of love and reverence for that, which as one of our poets said “is but a name for an effect whose cause is God.”

Many a small mystery one may have noted in earth or air, which can be only lightly touched, lightly grazed, as it were by the wing of a fly as it swept past a wild-flower.

A half-mythical peacock was, it is related, seen by Herodotus in Egypt. It is supposed to have had something to do with the phoenix: but none now can learn its

A Peacock's Prologue

history. Alexander the Great was so much pleased with the beauty of the peacock that he ordered none should be killed ; and it was at about his time they were brought into Greece. There they rapidly increased in number. Pliny speaks of the pride and glory the peacock takes in himself. "He taketh no small pleasure in the eyes of his feathers."

We read in a mystical allegorical poem by Ferridudeen Athay the Persian, "The Language of Birds," that the Peacock introduced Satan into Paradise under the form of the Seven-headed Serpent. The bird was expelled from Eden and the joys of the Sidra and the Tuba, the two Trees which confer immortality and perpetual Happiness.

"Although I am the Gabriel of birds, and to make me, the Painter of the invisible world gave his pencil to the Genii, my lot has been lower than that of the Archangel. For I contracted a friendship with the Seven-headed Serpent, and from Eden I was driven out into solitude, deprived of my high rank and punished by the ugliness of my feet. Yet do I still retain the hope of being released from my obscure abode on Earth, and restored to the Eternal Mansions." Not despairing, thus laments the Peacock. . . .

A Peacock's Prologue

Travellers in the East record their delight at the splendour of the wild Peacocks that decorate with brilliant colours the trees in the forests and jungles of India. There occurs a beautiful little bit of landscape in Heber's travels:—"On the summit of the bank that rose near the Grove of Mango trees was a Hindu Temple approached by one of the grandest flights of steps I have ever seen. Around it the ground divided into hillocks and pinnacles by the effects of the rains; and on every pinnacle sat a wild peacock, who doubly protected by his own divine character and the acknowledged sanctity of the place, displayed his gorgeous feathers to the setting sun. Their numbers and extraordinary beauty filled the mind with wonder." This expression "displayed" their feathers, as here used, is quite correct. To any who may have seen a peacock spreading out his feathers in the sun, turning this way and that his lustrous neck, it is clear that he beholds "a Peacock in Pride!" that is, with all the plumes spread out; the old Heraldic type of greatness and royalty. The Crest, of a Peacock in Pride, was only awarded to the gods, and to Emperors and Kings and the Greatest on Earth; it was meant to show that those of highest dignity ought to provide for

A Peacock's Prologue

others,—with an infinity of Eyes to watch over their welfare.

The emblem of Renown was painted all over eyes and ears to see and understand everything, and to fly everywhere impelled by the breath of Glory.

Even now, in this twentieth century, matter of fact as in most things we are, and notwithstanding all our scientific perception of eye and intellect, the idea of the Peacock still retains a measure of its old occult meaning, although the germ of that meaning and the reason why, may be lost, and though legend and fable are all entirely modern, compared with the ancient mysteries of Hindu and Burmese religions.

A peacock feather will scare the demons; yet there be some to whom the presence of the bird is but another word for malison instead of blessing—a bringer of sorrow rather than good luck. Gardens are there, where round about some ancestral House, the peacocks pace all day and curve their sapphire necks and expand the jewelled brilliance of their fan, or roost in quiet amid the blackness of overshadowing cedars; and where no presage of evil on account of them, will ever assault the happiness of Home.

Other houses again, cannot admit within

A Peacock's Prologue

their doors even a single feather of the peacock without some untoward accident occurring, or some disaster befalling the inmates. There is the oft-told story of a country house, and a lady who one day while sitting in the drawing-room upstairs, laughing and talking with a party of friends, suddenly exclaimed,—starting up and hurrying to the window,—“Oh, the Peacock!” She opened the window and instantly disappeared. The startled guests who had rushed after her, looking down beheld the lady lying dead upon the gravel beneath the window, whilst a beautiful peacock stood near her in his Pride, with his round of outspread plumes.

Stories of peacock myth or fable are many, and we know that superstition with coincidence accounts for much. Yet who can wonder if the fear and superstitious dread of this magnificent bird of ill-omen, should at times fill one with dismay? Another tale is told of a fine old mansion somewhere in Wales that had remained empty and tenantless for a number of years. A tenant at last was found; and the family arrived on a brilliant day in the middle of June. It is said they all went out into the garden, and round to the stable court-yard to meet the horses coming from town. They heard their tramp and the voices of the stablemen who were

A Peacock's Prologue

bringing them in, and one of the ladies went forward before the others to receive and welcome her own favourite riding horse, a beautiful grey, whom she saw just entering through the gate, led by the stud-groom. The horse advanced with a little neigh of recognition, but had no sooner stepped into the court-yard than he suddenly stopped short, reared up, and the next moment fell back dead at his mistress' feet.

A few days after the owner of the house received a letter from his new tenant, stating that an over-mantel above the fire-place in one of the principal rooms in the house had been the cause of the death of a valuable horse, and praying that it might be at once removed out of the house lest a worse thing should happen. This over-mantel had a certain value of its own. It was a kind of drapery or hanging, made of peacocks' feathers, enwound with blue and green, and wrought curiously in gold thread and silken needlework, and sparkling with gems. It had been the gift of a dear friend, and had been sent from the Indies—long ago. The Tenant's demand caused surprise, but was immediately obeyed ; and, with the order for the removal of this peacock-hanging, a letter was sent by the landlord to his Head Gardener, an old retainer of many years' service on the estate.

A Peacock's Prologue

So at dead of night the aged, white-haired gardener, bearing a lantern and a spade, and carrying also the Evil-Eyed fabric over his arm, made his way towards the secluded, woody outskirts, of the Garden Wilderness. There he sought, under some thick trees, for a spot where the earth seemed newly disturbed, and where weeds and wild ivy still lay cut and scattered about. The old man dug deep until his lamp shone on some ghostly grey, smooth surface, down below. There, he dropped the folded drapery down, the earth was shovelled back into the grave (for such it was) of the ill-fated horse, while with ruthless foot, bright green feathers, and relucant gold and emerald gems were at once stamped and trod in firm. And thereafter those tenants slept in peace. So runs the tale.

And there is the monastic legend which makes the Peacock unblest for young children. The story of how the Holy Family in their flight from Egypt, sheltered in the centre of a thick juniper tree—Herod's horsemen being close at their heels. It was a wild place, and the gorse pods all around kept crackling and bursting open, and pea-chicks screamed and disturbed the Child, who began to cry and was nearly discovered by the soldiers. So Mary rose up and banned them

A Peacock's Prologue

all round ! . . . And that is why gorse is never to this day permitted in gardens, and why peacocks are unlucky to babies, and juniper is the "Wache Holde," or "Awake, dearest !" for it welcomed the Holy Family and hid them ; and then when danger was at an end opened its boughs to let them pass out.

Many more stories and legends no doubt there are about the marvellous bird. But more than these I have not heard, and nothing further can I learn of any special interest, than the little that has been set down here. Some unknown, mysterious, peacock cult, I believe, does somewhere indeed exist. What this may be I know not. No one seems to have heard aught of it. All we know is that, not all the peacocks of the East, not all the gilded green or dreamless dark of their myriad eyes, can ever penetrate for us the gloom of ages.

Perhaps after all there is nothing to learn ; unless beyond the unseen Door, which opening at last, will show the unknown springs of Life and Death : and show us the secret of the Beautiful in sea and land and leaf and flower,—the origin and growth of Nature's infinite variety, and the hidden keys of her Paint-box.

Thoughts of the splendour, the mystery, the Unknowable in the natural world of life

A Peacock's Prologue

around us must be and are, far beyond anything that might be looked for in so slight work as these short essays—save at times, when some faint reflex of the influences around us that we see and know, or that we feel and are aware of, yet know not,—there is little else but a few impressions noted here. And they would seem scarce tangible enough to fit in with the mystic note of Pavone, or Peacock symbolism. Yet may one not venture sometimes to connect even slight impressions with things that are imperishable?

With some, who in their hearts care for these things, the feeling is always fresh; the interest ever new; the sweetness and the pleasure cannot decay.

And now as we stroll around the peacock's pleasaunce, we mark where two or three (not white), lost in the glow of a summer day, shake out a sheaf of glittering glory. There is a singular arrangement noted about those many-eyed feathers. Each little plumelet that forms the so-called "eye," in each is differently set,—on a different plane, at another angle from its fellow. The meaning is, that each one may catch the golden ray as it falls, and every plume may shine its best; something after the fashion of the revolving lantern of a lighthouse, where one after

A Peacock's Prologue

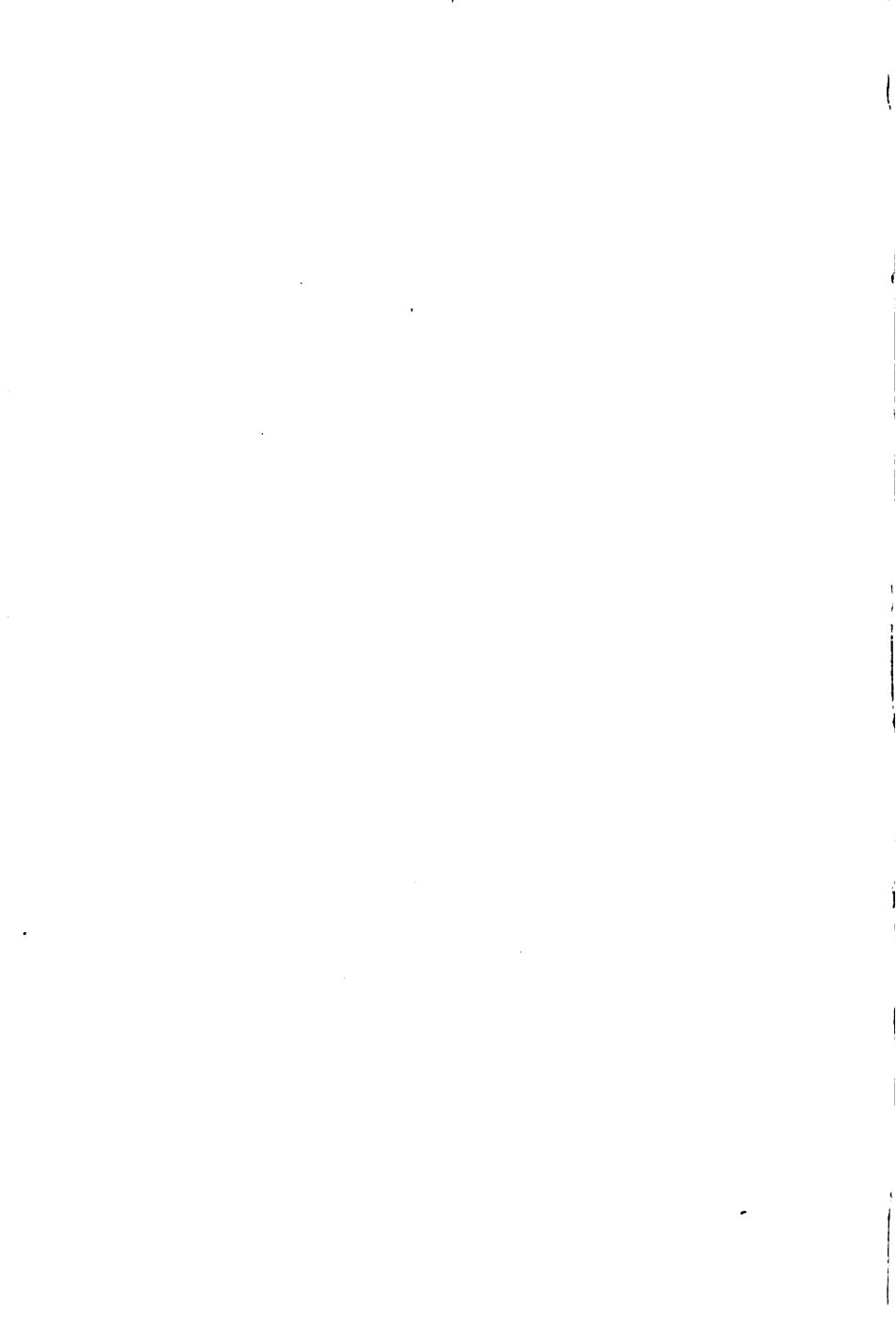
another every facet reflects in turn the shining light.

True is it, though marvellously strange, how Nature's ways are not to be compassed by the mind of man. We have to sit still, and remember a written word: "In wisdom hast Thou made them all."

Once, when I was a child, I dreamed that one morning very early, before the sun rose, I went out into the garden and wandered along the green terrace by the river. And there stood a peacock in the dewy grass. And the peacock was so beautiful, so full of grace and colour, that I held up my gown in my hand and danced. And the peacock spread up his feathers of green and gold, all eyed with purple, and he too danced a minuet amidst the sparkling dewdrops.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
A PEACOCK'S PROLOGUE	v
I. PLEROMA	i
II. ÆNIGMA	17
III. A BEAUTIFUL WORLD	31
IV. THE HAUNTED WOOD	47
V. A WHITE EARWIG	83
VI. AN (ALMOST) IDEAL CITY	97
VII. OF A LITTLE OLD HOUSE IN BANFFSHIRE	113
VIII. ON THE BRIDGE AT LUCERNE	127
IX. IN PRAISE OF BIRDS	143
X. WEEDS OF THE GARDEN	179
XI. THE HUMAN INTEREST OF A GARDEN	209
XII. ART EDUCATION—I	221
" " " —II	243



ILLUSTRATIONS

SO SWEET THE HOURS OF FAIRYLAND! SO SAD IS STERN REALITY . . .	<i>Frontispiece</i>
ONE OF SEVEN . . .	<i>To face page 2</i>
SUNLESS WEATHER. . .	" " 50
IN PRIDE ... "POWDERED WITH STARS". . .	" " 100
IN DOUBT . . .	" " 124
OPPRESSED WITH A SENSE OF LOSS! . . .	" " 146
HE WALKS IN BEAUTY . . .	" " 182
IN LOVE . . .	" " 212

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E. V. B.



I

Pleroma



*Fulness of Beauty : fairest among flowers
of the mountain.*

I
P
Pleroma

PLEROMA was discovered on the Organ Mountains in South America, and thence carried to England in the year 1841. Sixty years ago: and yet, so far as I know, it is still but rarely met with there. Most of our English hothouses, I believe, are entirely empty of its gentle presence. And yet, if not to all, to me at least, *Pleroma* is, of all lovely flowers, the loveliest; and perhaps it is also among the strangest, in its nature and its ways.

On the table beside me, as I write, is a little plant of *Pleroma*, about six or seven inches in height, growing healthily and happy in a tiny three-inch garden flower-pot. There is no sign of the root being pinched for want of room. The size of the flower, two inches at least across, is not less than it would have been had the whole plant grown up full-sized and tall. This sort of patient quiet is, perhaps, one of its chief characteristics.

But the colour!—the purple of it!—lumin-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

ous as of a lamp shining through the broad petals—who can presume to describe?

The flower is poised sideways on its stem. And here would seem to be something like a small mystery. Why should this one flower, alone among all the rest of the world of flowers, hang *sideways* on its stem? The position is unnatural; unlike that of any other. However, it must surely be that growing thus, we who love Pleroma may be enabled to understand her best; and thus our eyes shall look the more joyfully on her purple grace. In that place no other eyes, so far as we can tell, would care to gaze, and even to us she is known only after having been long borne away, far from her own wild home; carried off over the sea to exist for a time under glass in a few English gardens, regarded by most gardeners as something old-fashioned and gone-by.

In those lonely hills, among them that pass that way, there is none who turn aside to look. They that roam in the dusk of evening seeking their prey, pass by and waste not one glance upon Pleroma's bloom. The jaguar and the keen-eyed lynx—little do they heed the purple miracle in their path. The wild beasts that are in the mountain tread it down.

Conies browse and play there, and small



ONE OF SEVEN



Pleroma

furry creatures take their pastime ; or Lamia winds in sheeny length between the stalks of grass and fragrant herbage—when the fierce diamond snake of the Organs sleeps in his lair. Such as these inhabit the spot made sacred by the fair beauty of Pleroma. The solitary vulture, musing upon the dead, beholds not. The condor, with vast wings overshadowing the sun, regards not. It is nothing to them that those purple petals are spread open, so even and so smooth—fashioned like a five-rayed star. Could it have been for man's delight alone it was created? At night, when flowers also sleep, Pleroma remains awake ; she hangs from her stalk wide open and awake. Night and day, the light and the dark, are alike to her.

Upon the crest of a rocky Organ slope, facing the crimson West, rise the thinly scattered groves of flowering Pleroma. At the desolate moment ere yet sunset dies, the glory of it flames through these hanging lamps of violet. And many there be that answer to the signal. Swiftly white-plumed moths, one by one, in the day when they had rent their silken shrouds, arising from the earth made downy upward flight to court, as it were, an unknown doom in the heart of their purple oriflamme. They gaze upon it, but they know nothing of the wonder of it.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Were I to tell the secret of Pleroma's charm, it is this. It lies only in her pure, most perfect simplicity. From the velvet grey and pointed oval of her leaf—so carefully nerved with long unbranched veins united at the tip, where each leaf inclines gently downwards—to the surface of the flat, rounded, violet petals, no spot nor shade of any deeper tint is suffered to mar the fine breadth of effect. This breadth in colour, or in light and shade as painters use the term, is, I think, one of the qualities that most inspire with delight.

And when the flower's last end draws near, each detail is so ordered that no least attribute of life's loveliness is lost in death. Not until the latest hour of life is any change visible. No wrinkle clouds the youthful smoothness of her glowing purple. Only at the very last, just one petal will calmly drop in the stillness of peace. Again, after a little space, gently, unhasting, a second petal falls. And so, one by one until the end; till all is done, and Pleroma's star has set.

Then five violet patches lie scattered lightly on the earth around her roots.

There has been no decay, no sign of age; it is but a chill like no other chill, that has passed across that exquisite bloom, and meekly the call is obeyed.

Pleroma

This, then, may be perhaps the moment to whisper of a sudden deadly change, by which at this time the plant is overtaken. Up to the hour when her star declined, the life-record of Pleroma had been so lovely, her ways throughout the days of her brief existence so full of a kind of reticence, that one wonders whence comes this new strange ugliness? Whence is the cruel, weird ferocity of sickle-shaped stamens with their strong, hungry curve, their impatient attitude of grip, ready to seize and crush the prey. Disrobed of their soft petalling, these stamens are now laid bare. Ruthless, they lie in wait. The points or claws of them shine black and rigid, and their joints are rosy red. Pale moths (those newly risen ones), small gnats—frail ephemeræ, born of hot southern morns, and gay, fantastic, painted flies, with blind vague flight tempt fate within the lurid embrace of Pleroma's ruined calyx.

The final sacrifice, I confess, I never actually saw. Indeed, I know not whether or no my theory be absolutely true. Certain it is, however, that Nature rarely errs in the outward expression of secret character. It may indeed be that evil lurks in the latest phase of this peerless flower's existence. Yet if living moths or light-winged flies have

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

been for long ages past ordained her food, it follows that they have to be ensnared in some manner. Strange, after all I know, or think I know of her crimes, Pleroma in my heart of hearts is not unqueened. She stays there, almost without a rival. For beauty is a thing apart, it can take no earth-stain. Like the striving of the soul after Truth—the essence of it is divine.

The birthplace of Pleroma is to me entirely familiar. And whenever I see her lovely colour, a vision of those Organ mountains whereon her flower abides, is also before me. In vivid noonday light, I see the long line of peaked and ragged rock showing dark against the sky. Grey slopes, green lawny spaces, forest-trees: and clefts of the rock, where hide the spirits of the air when winds blow wide the skirts of their misty raiment; when the deep music of organ tones is heard pealing afar in solemn fugues, while Echo answers with her faint refrain. And well I know the mountain's shadowy mysteries of moonlight. And the blackness of night all glorious with the starry hosts of heaven—the sparkling myriads, beholding from above. The scene is clear to me as a painted picture, seen with the Soul's innermost insight.

But to consider with my eyes the wild

Pleroma

solitudes of the Organ mountains as they are, far away, within sound of the rush of the Great River : to wander amid the purple freshness of their flora—for such a moment of intensest joy, I must await the day when the window opens, and I shall arise and go forth whither the spirit leads. Unloosed from mortal life : free of the body's sloth ; free to follow on the wings of desire. Neither let nor hindrance then. Seas and land are not. Day and night in that hour are as one. The dawn and the dusk, the length of a thousand miles, or only across a field. The yearning of a self-less love carries us wheresoever we list.

I do not in reality know where, if anywhere on earth, are to be found those Organ mountains. When Time has ceased I shall know. Their place is unmarked on any map that I have seen. It can scarcely be that the name is out of date. There is a pair of large globes terrestrial and celestial with the date of the eighteenth century, I used once to be acquainted with. On neither are the Organs marked. For more than a hundred years have these old globes stood in the library window-recess of an old forsaken house in the West of England. There, in years gone by I used often to stand over them and study them ; but never did I

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

make out Pleroma's Mountain range on any part of their printed surface. . . .

And now visions of the wild hill country empurpled with splendours of these petalled stars, fades away,—lost in immeasurable space.

As for myself, never could I tire of Pleroma. There may be some who glancing through the page devoted to her praise, will likely enough believe it overdone, and that which has been so often said, will still be said again, *i.e.* "Writers treat of flowers and plants with over-much of sentiment, or else they are too didactic." Perhaps a few readers are able with all their heart to enter into the strangeness of the wonder of any flower of the field. But few in number are they who rightly understand even the flowers in their own garden, otherwise than as part of a scheme of decoration. Very wearisome are the long descriptions and directions for how these "decorations" may best be grown. Happily none can complain they have learned from me anything at all about a plant called Pleroma, neither the proper care of it in our hot-houses, nor indeed anything at all decisive of the place where it grows.

Painting never could portray the character, nor poetry give in words the marvel of its translucent violet. Yet a great longing

Pleroma

possessed me to try the making of a little sketch. And should the sketch seem too bright and the praise too lavish, as of "heap added unto heap"—it is easy to turn to any dictionary of gardening the reader chooses and find Pleroma's story given like this, copied from a gardening paper:—"Pleroma (from *pleroma*, fulness), referring to the cells of the capsule. Syn. *Lasiandra*, including *Chetogastra*, *Melastoma*, *Michranthella*, and *Rhexia* (in part). ORD. *Melastomaceæ*. A genus containing about one hundred and twenty-four species of stove or greenhouse shrubs and sub-shrubs, rarely perennial herbs, often striggsopilose or hispid, natives of tropical South America, being mostly Brazilian. Flowers violet or purple usually disposed in terminal trichotomously-branched panicles large sometimes with concave involucral bracts: calyxtutœ ovoid campanulate urceolate. Leaves frequently coriaceous petulate," and so on. "*P. elegans* forms a fine exhibition plant when well grown. Branches tetragonal ovate, acuminate, &c., &c. Organ Mountains, 1841." (So the Organs do certainly exist somewhere although I find them not).

However scientifically dry and learnedly correct, a description like this bears no sort of likeness to Pleroma. There is in it nothing

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

to stir the heart, nothing that might inspire any human being with the least wish to meet with her. The very name "P. elegans" at once destroys poetic feeling.

The colour of Pleroma somehow seems to fascinate with a strange delight. It is lilac, or in the nature of lilac, the poet's colour. It is purple—the imperial Tyrian dye. It is the violet of divine inspiration. It is a sense echo of forgotten gleams from unremembered hills of ancient lands, or from the purple deeps of southern seas. It has come down the ages to us through æons of antenatal lives. This allurements of certain natural colours sometimes felt within the heart of many of us, has come by the way of these remotest immemorial lives. How otherwise can the alien charm of special colours in nature be explained?

For those at least, to whom the supreme joy of Pleroma is unknown—can anything of this kind compare with the sensation which at times comes to one like a dream whilst following along a green footpath, through some English meadow a'bloom with autumn crocus? Or when looking down—as once I looked—over the shoulder of a barren hill-top somewhere in Kashmir, and the eye rests on a dream-lilac below, flooding over plains of saffron? . . . One or two perhaps may seem

Pleroma

to feel a sudden thrill—like the cadences of an Eolian harp—whilst walking in a garden at moments when the sun breaks forth and shines upon a border set with a certain small, common, lilac gem-flower that has chanced beside a garden walk. The plant is so common, I believe scarce one in ten would turn to look, or give a second glance as they pass. Yet who may tell whence, or in what dim ages past, may date back for these few individuals the psychical attraction, of just a touch of magic in the heart of a little common, unhonoured, “Virginian stock”?

I must not weary by praising any more the purple flower which means so much to me, Pleroma, fulness (of beauty). Now and again the gardener will bring in a branch of it lit up by one side-long violet star. In silence he places it in a glass of water before me, so that for a space I may gaze with silent joy, dreaming perhaps a little of the sound of the wind in the far distant Organ mountains, and the glow of their wild Pleroma.

Does not the thought of one beautiful thing lead on to thoughts of another? So the colour of Pleroma recalls to my mind a violet rainbow—once seen, and its like to be seen perhaps never more. And also of another wondrous arch in the heavens, that

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

appeared not long before, all built up of gold and diamond dust. These two visions both appeared to us one summer in the Highlands of Inverness—land of the storm and the sunburst—of the glory of the cloud. A dark sky gloomed between the red stems of some old Scotch fir before the door, when a sudden rainbow flashed out, as it were, in our faces.

The rainbow arched all across the whole sky, as far-thrown it reached from horizon to horizon. A rainbow so fiery and solemn, so vividly brilliant, never before had our eyes beheld. A part of it absolutely dazzled with excess of light and colour, as the bow shot upward athwart the hills till lost in the glimmering keystone of its stupendous arc. It flamed of rubies and molten gold, and shone with amethyst and waned into mist and broke again in fire, mirrored and multiplied above and beyond and within—till at last with a thousand mystic changes, the rainbow died into the dark.

At the first great glow of it, birds who were roosting earlier that evening, had awoken and dashed hastily from their dim green tents, out into the open firmament. Bats were flitting round, and two horses grazing in the field below the house were moved to lift up their heads from the grass, and stood still

Pleroma

and gazed with us. . . . "Prismatic colours are so radiantly glorious that a rainbow is, each time we see it, a joyful surprise, and the most solid natures are moved by it." All of us silently looked up with rapture, and the household had come out to stare and wonder. We heard them calling to one another, "Look! look! the beautiful rainbow!"

Then as it faded, cold and leaden-hued the whole landscape had become. A little stir and rustle might be heard as the birds settled to sleep again among the branches. The two horses in the field bent down their heads and gravely returned to their feeding. Evening closed in, and the moon rose.

As we thought upon the splendour of the sight we had seen, we felt how that great arch rising from the earth, growing up to heaven's height, and in radiance descending again to earth, was but a type of the perfect human life that all may long to live—yet few attain.

But will ever mortal eye behold again as ours did just once the marvel of a *violet rainbow*? It was far away in the hills. All day the sun had shone. Then, as it drew towards evening, blue-black clouds in tumultuous layers began to overspread the sky. On the old stone bridge where brown waters tumble

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and rush over the Falls of Fech near Kingussie, we stood awhile watching the circling foam below. Something made us look up; and there—laid as it were upon the gloom—shone the glory of a violet rainbow!

No seven colours such as other rainbows were there, only one broad band of purple and green. Just where this glory arose, on the one side it stained a violet path across the walls of a low white cottage under the hill with a garden and in the fence a little garden gate, and across the hill-side woods at the back, and across two or three apple trees and a central rose-bush flushed with pink, and across the figure of a woman standing at the garden gate. A peacock by her side shook down emerald splendours. Very still and preternaturally tall, wrapt in shimmering sapphire, triumphantly beautiful, stood the figure at the gate. Clothed with the rainbow, crowned with light, we saw her stand, as though ready to rise and soar above God's symbol in the cloud, like the Iris of Hope! As we looked we could not speak: a sense of awe for the moment kept us silent.

Then light began to fail upon the cold hill-side; the blue-black heavens loomed down heavily: and the form of exulting Hope our eyes had beheld faded utterly away.

Pleroma

There was but a very old woman, with something white about her head, leaning wearily over the gate; and near her, with drooping plumes, stole away into the shadows a bird of ashy whiteness. With a weird sensation, as if awakening from a dream we turned away following the long road home, not saying many words to one another; knowing that at such an hour, amid wild muirs and dimly desolate paths, the Unknown is near and spirits walk.

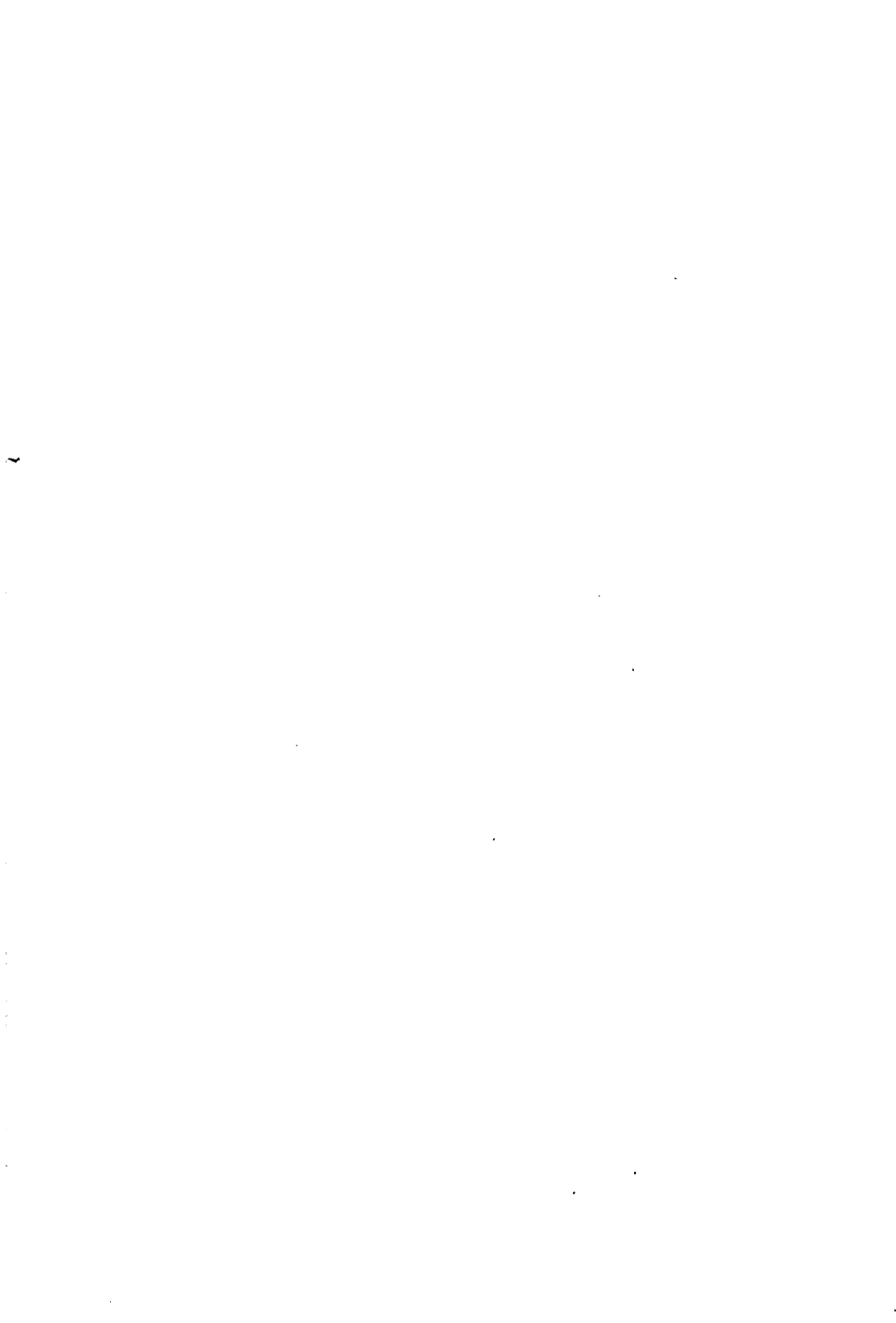
II

Ænigma



It is there : it is here :——

It lives : it is not.



II

Ænigma

THE sweetness of the garden in its mid-day silence and soft veiled sunshine awoke thoughts both sad and strange. I thought of a far-away Rock beyond "the salt, estranging sea," a thousand miles away. I saw The Rock as it stood alone, walled in with surf above the deep blue sea,—in all the desolation of a burning, fiery summer. In a moment of time the whole scene lay mirrored in imagination's glass. I saw a white Spanish Villa in the midst of a dried-up terraced garden, every window closely shuttered, with vain hope to hold the heat at bay. I saw tall palms and long spikes of flowering acanthus bend beneath the terrible blast, blowing straight from Sahara. I saw the birds drop dead as they winged across the garden, and the goldfish, gasping or dead, lying on the surface of the water like red autumn leaves, in the little square tank by the terrace steps. Save within the shrunken shadow of the house, in all the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

place there was no shade ; for every green leaf was shrivelled and fallen away from the burnt-up trees. For a mile all round the whole sad place stretched a scorched and arid desert, with long, white, forsaken roads, whereon no living creature moved—desolate, dried up, dusty roads. And over all the small, cruel sun in heaven glared fiercely down. I saw darkness approach ; stealthily at first, then all at once, it came suddenly in one instant, and the awful sun-terror relaxed. One by one closed doors and windows opened, and the old Professor, with his pretty daughter Miriam, who together had endured this long ordeal of heat, stood for awhile on the terrace that surrounded three sides of the house, and breathed fresh life as the day bowed down and black night fell. Both seemed exhausted with the heat, and but few words passed between them. Most likely the Professor pondered some deep scientific question of the day, whilst his daughter's thoughts wandered away far elsewhere.

And now impictured on the magic glass I witnessed a curious little mystery. Father and daughter had gone back into the house, where just one lamp was lit for the Professor in his study. There he sat himself down amidst all his heaped up books and

Ænigma

papers, while Miriam bade him good-night, saying she was tired and would go upstairs. So she shut the door and went up.

The staircase was opposite the door that gave on the terrace; a short stair with one or two sharp turns. At the very first step Miriam tripped; her foot had caught in something, and she nearly fell. The entanglement, whatever it was, seemed to catch her at every step, as if a net were spread. And she had to stumble on as well as she could, tripping and almost falling all the way at every step, up to the top; and even then it stretched across the passage and right into her room. All this time it was quite dark, and not until she had found a match and lighted a candle did she find out what "the thing" really was. Nothing but a slender—a very slender, very long, pink thread! Round the chairs and tables and round her feet the pink snare wound about, worked across and across just the same as up the stairs. The question was, who in the world could have done it, and for what possible reason? At last, after struggling entirely free (for break the thread she could not), Miriam sat down to recover her breath and to unravel and draw out the lengths of thread, winding them into a ball. And then Justine was called; and then the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

other domestics gathered on the stairs, full of curiosity, and their mistress questioned each in turn and made every sort of inquiry. Not a soul belonging to the Villa knew anything about the matter, or could throw the least light upon it. The fact remained, that a snare had been laid apparently to entangle the first person who happened to set foot on the stairs.

Some one, indeed, ventured to suggest it might possibly have been the work of the gardener Antoine, the jealous lover of Antoinette the cook, and that the snare was intended for her. Upon which Antoinette fired up, declaring that "Antoine had no cause for jealousy; and, even if he had, he was far too clever to plan a useless silly revenge like that!" The "mystery" therefore remained unsolved. Nobody could explain it, though everybody had a great deal to say about it. The only certainty appeared to be that there was not an inch of such a thing as pink thread, wool, or worsted in any one's possession in the house at the time. Yet this thread measured several I w's in length—a long yarn, indeed! It was and troublesome enough to wind it all up, where certainly it took a long while; but fessorm, being careful and rather fond of down ng things, thought it might come in

Ænigma

useful for something or other some day; so she patiently made it up into a pretty pink ball and put it away. . . .

At last the time came for Miriam and her father to desert for a season their island home and sail for England, and the Villa was shut up,—the girl having first most carefully locked away the mysterious ball of pink thread in a cupboard, the key of which, moreover, she carried off in her pocket.

Three months after, the family returned, and the Villa on the rock was made ready to receive them. The garden, bright with flowers and sunshine, lay bathed in all the balmy loveliness of a Southern winter, and the sun-terror of last summer quite forgotten, with all the pain and suffering it had brought in the pleasant excitement of returning home, with the unpacking of trunks and arranging of the rooms in order.

At last, Miriam suddenly remembered about the locked cupboard and its contents, and hurried to her room with the key. Almost the first glance when the cupboard door was opened showed her that the thread had disappeared. The work-basket was there on the shelf just where she had left it. The unfinished bit of em-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

broidery, and skeins of coloured silks, and all the other things, scissors and thimble, &c., were there in the basket, but not the ball of pink thread. It was nowhere to be found; it seemed utterly gone. Every corner of the house was diligently searched in vain. Miriam, greatly perplexed, knew not what to think and for the moment gave it up. After a while a vague surmise began to take possession of the girl's mind. After all, could it have been really thread? or—and the bare thought of such a thing made her flesh creep—could it have been—a Worm? “Yes,” she said to herself, with sudden inspiration, “it must have been a frightful, long, dry worm . . . plainly it was nothing else; and the creature unwound itself, and it slipt away through the keyhole—slipt downstairs and out under the terrace door and away into the garden!” Then she reflected that somewhere, in some old book of travels, she had read of strange distorted growths that in times long past were not unknown, born of intolerable, tropic heat—heat such as last summer's—on some volcanic rock like the island where they lived, far out at sea. Could it be, then, that a Worm of inconceivable length had indeed been bred here by the fiery might of the sun, and that it had crept one day

Ænigma

for shelter into the cool darkness of the Villa to hide from that scorching sun-glare?

Miriam believed she saw the whole thing clearly now. The thread must certainly have been a Worm. Then a feeling as of strange unpleasant glamour came over her with a cold shiver,—the pink thread was a living being! Long yards of a living Worm. . . . Presently she recalled that, when her feet were caught in those living toils that night, the tangle had seemed endowed with an extraordinary sort of muscular, *squirming* strength; and also she thought she remembered it felt curiously cool, or even clammy, to the touch. She shivered again to think how she had handled it—made knots of it—made a ball of it—and shut it up in a cupboard, locked the door, and left it there for months. And then there came a nervous tremor for fear the Worm perhaps was now at large, and, as she imagined, not far off in the garden; probably concealed at the bottom of the little square tank, where the gold-fish died in the hot weather, close under the windows by the terrace steps. Fancy pictured the creature even now at this very moment quietly sliding in, ready to ensnare her again, about the stairs or passages in its unnatural net.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Starting up at the thought, Miriam ran down, calling to her father as she swiftly passed the study in eager haste to lock the garden door. "Oh, father," she cried, "it was *not* pink thread that night last summer that tripped me up as I went upstairs to bed. It must have been,—it could have been nothing else,—a long, dreadful Worm—a live, living, pink Worm! Only to think how I undid it—and made knots—and drew it and wound it tight in my hands! But the creature is bolted and barred out safe enough now." And she shoved the door-mat against the barred door for greater security. Hearing his daughter's cry, the Professor came at once, pausing an instant on the threshold. Then he, with the wisdom of the aged, replying said, "Child, no doubt there exist in every place beings both short and long. But to the lean and thready, as you describe this long Worm, what are your bolts and bars of iron? To such as him 'stone walls do not a prison make.' Call me should the thing re-enter the house. I will immediately come, and will straightway bottle him; or I will constrain him weightily between the leaves, within the covers of one of my biggest books." Having thus spoken, the Professor retreated into his

Ænigma

study, shutting out the whole of the outside world, immersed, as was his wont, for hours in the old, strange world of books—for him more familiar, more illimitable than the other.

The pepper-trees cast light, gauzy shadows across the stone paving of the little terrace, and tall palms waved their long green hands above it. Along the walls a lizard now and then glanced by in gold and green under the sun. Late-blowing blossoms of rose-apple glowed in beauty on the tree, or dropt rosy petals amongst the snows of "pico-paloma" that embraced their roots; while broad suns of glowing mesembrianthemum starred every foot of bare earth. And in the Villa Garden all was tranquil; until a soft sea-wind arose and washed the white surf and the sea against the rock, where it shone like a jewel in the blue. Then mists began to blur the surface of my mirror—and I saw nor heard no more. Yet my thoughts were not idle, turning over in my mind the small, unimportant ænigma that at one time seemed so greatly to confuse the wits of the family and household who lived in the Villa. They have long since departed; and whether the pink thread were really a thread, or whether

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

it were in truth a living creature, none now may ever know nor guess the riddle aright. Miriam has almost ceased to think of it, and her learned father has quite forgotten. Antoinette and Antoine are married and gone away. The deserted Villa is To Let. The little square tank under the terrace wall is dry, and the garden, once tended with such loving care, has grown into a wild wilderness of neglected charms. It is little else save a battlefield of flowers and weeds, where the finer parts of each are lost in the never-ceasing contest for some first, supremest place.

And far down in among the obscure roots of weed and flower, who may know what manner of mystic beings, strangers to the bright light of heaven, lurk concealed and hid amid the thick green of their upper growth? Part of earth and in part shreds of the inner spirit that once transfused all metals in the mines, it is certain that the eye of man not often sees them. Perhaps, indeed, such things may have no real existence, save only now and again in the fireflies' fires, or in the splendours of many-coloured butterflies flickering alike over flower and barren weed.

Heat-waves of tropical intensity in their season again will lay waste all that remains

Ænigma

of the Garden on the Rock, or in their season rains will descend upon it. Into the empty house strange visitants will pass by unseen ways, returning as they came. But should it chance that new tenants have settled in, then a trouble of some sort must ensue. Poor, humblest of paravails, tenants of the lowest stories,—and dark Ænigmas will once more arise and spin their webs and snares to perplex the mind of Youth and Age. And who is the seer that shall tell us which is which?—what is?—or what is not? “In mystery our soul abides.”



III

A Beautiful World



*House joined to house. Field after field destroyed.
The whole country made unlovely.*

III

A Beautiful World

The Eye that Sees, the Heart that Finds

WITHOUT a doubt Surrey is the most beautiful place in the world! That is — of course in soberest reality, it is not quite that. But to-day, this fine August day, sitting under the oak that veils with its shadow more than half the lawn belonging to our Surrey cottage, one can but think something like that in one's heart, even if the lips say it not in so many words. Our oak is magnificent in form and in height and breadth. The fine, rough trunk of him rises straight up without a flaw, and his branches spread wide all round. There is nothing alive within their green fastnesses. Nothing at least that can be seen. No insects ever drop on the book if one reads there — sitting on the long bench beneath, not even those tiny emerald green moths made like unto a bishop's mitre, though so common and well remembered on other oaks.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Birds seem not to love it much, scarcely perching for a moment, soon flying down to light upon the grass. Sometimes an owl has been heard to hoot unseen at evening within the leaves, just to let us know he's there. Sometimes he seems to whisper something very low ; and it has happened, should there be a sound of reading aloud within the lighted parlour near, the owl will hoot from the oak a sort of monotone, in the same key as the reader's voice.

The cottage stands upon a tableland along the wide valley : and along the valley come wild wandering winds that toss the oak's lighter branches hither and thither, and hardly ever let them rest. The winds will blow for days and nights together without ceasing. Storms that might shake to its centre some still greater tree, do but make known the strength of that strong, steadfast stem that has been building up inch by inch during the last two or three centuries. For the tree is young. He stands there in all the glory of the prime of his age ; not more than five-and-twenty, perhaps, reckoned as with the age of a man. Long, long may he stand in his place unmoved ; the tap-root of him established firmly, deep-rooted, straight down in the earth—good for another five hundred years

A Beautiful World

or more. At Beninborough Park, in Yorkshire, an oak a thousand years old was once pointed out to me, under whose shade St. Augustine is believed to have preached.

On the left a great Surrey Down looks down upon lawn and tree and house—with many a broad field between—rolling away to westward, calm and untroubled save by the iron road that runs at its foot. No living creature, beast nor man, is often seen to climb the dry, grassy steep; the even surface is undisturbed save by a few breadths of pine plantation, cast carelessly upon it, as it were. Yet groups of little children may at times be discerned from the oak-tree lawn, little white or grey dots climbing up the steep. Often they will come home with a big white empty snail-shell or two, held fast in their hands or wrapt in their pinafores. These are relics, it is said, from those ancient days when the Romans encamped there. Snails were reckoned then a rare delicacy, as in these days they still are, in many parts of France and Italy. So those old Romans carried their snails with them to the Surrey Downs, across the Channel. And one may please one's fancy with the thought that the empty shells the children find are the very shells the Romans threw away after dinner, that have ever since during all these centuries

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of sun and wind lain bleaching on the hills. It is more likely, however, that the snailshells now picked up are far more modern, and may have belonged to generations of descendants from the Roman soldiers' succulent favourites. Whether it be so or not, the big snails themselves are not found here living—or so I am told—only their empty house.

It is a fair scene we look on from the seat under our great oak. Mysterious too in a way, these hills appear as one gazes up at their long line against the sky, not knowing well what may lie beyond the verge.

From our small cottage lawn, green meadows hedged about with nut and maple and dwarf oak, and interlaced with wild roses and rosy brambles, lead across to the rise of the Downs—an immense stretch of corn between; a cornfield that, in these ripe August days may be likened to some splendid breviary laid open upon the hillside—bound in vellum, lettered in gold, rich with painted capitals and miniatures; each page shot through with scarlet. We almost regret that the day is now near at hand when the farmer's fine chestnut team will enter the field, and the quartering of the ripened corn will begin. And as the red-gold falls before the resistless might of the strange, big, winnowing fan, an exquisite

A Beautiful World

little flowering white and pink convolvulus will come to light, twining round every one of the tall cornstalks. The existence of this delicate loveliness is hardly guessed until it is cut down: yet in its way I think it helped to enrich the beauty of the corn.

The oak we love has one shortcoming. He bears no acorns. A few oak-apples, indeed, litter the grass beneath after a gust of wind. They were fresh and very pink for the old-fashioned festival of May the twenty-ninth. But acorns,—beloved of fairy-land and me,—there are none. Stay . . . on closely regarding this lowest bough that leans down like an outspread hand, it is surely spangled over with a fresher green. The bough is covered thick with acorns! Small indeed, and oddly formed are they, and one might well have missed perceiving them at first.

What has a tree like this to do with such unimportant, little, flattened, green buttons? Our lordly oak should have sprung from the ideal of acorns—large and polished; in shape, a long oval, with clear-cut cup. Perhaps the flat buttons will grow out; and one is aware that there exist more than one sort of English oak—about twenty-six species in all, I believe. So these acorns may come to be larger before they fall.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

And now the oak on the Surrey lawn already is for me a memory, and nothing more. A green memory: for I shall never behold its branches break into tawny gold in autumn; nor grey and bare and desolate, "in a drear nighted December." We have looked our last goodbye, and are returned home; home, where so near at hand London comes striding into the country, our hearts and minds filled with a vision of a Tree; with the green of a leafy outline that for full three summer months had filled in the square of eastern window in my upper room at the cottage—ever present when I awoke, not absent when I slept.

And now I seem to know—now that I am far away from it—the true reason why Surrey is beautiful. It is not solely for the beauty of its woods and hills, and old-world villages, it is because for broad miles and many, around where we lived with the oak tree in August, we saw not any sign anywhere of the hideous disfigurement of "Advertisements!" The charm of the peaceful fields and wild commons is unspoil't by giant reminders of suffering humanity: or at least, only by the ever hateful reminder, an advertisement of Building Lands. It is a happy country; or it gives the idea of happiness. It is "a beautiful world."

A Beautiful World

Yet even here, in April, close to London's outskirts, in the garden, in the cherry orchards, this world, defaced and old and worn though it be, *is* still beautiful as a dream. If people would but leave it alone, and not break it up, and build ugly houses all over it. If they would but teach the children in the schools to see; teach them to love nature with a warm heart-love, to care about the green glory of young leaves and springing grass and sunset clouds, and all the joy that lies around them and which, as a rule, they know not, because they have never learnt to see. Few see naturally "with the eye that feeling gave," but the eye can be taught. I do not know how it is to be done in towns; and yet, the teacher having nature-love in his heart would find the way. For the children of the poor, I suppose, the enjoyment of beautiful things is not considered "suitable," although who can doubt the immeasurable good that such enjoyment could be to them? And for schools of a higher class, surely none whose eyes had been opened early and trained to see, would in after years care to plant big, hideous boards in the midst of pleasant fields, or to paint God's hoary rocks with advertisements. Besides their glaring inappropriateness, these things keep constantly before the mind, the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

human infirmities, the human domestic worries which we desire to put far from us when away from home. All this is a sore subject; the range is wide and there is so much to be said, and sometimes it seems so hopeless, and sometimes one leans to argue the other way, and think that the feeling must be born in the child and grow, and that it *never* can be taught. The growth and multiplying of schools of art does not seem to have made much progress in this direction. Self, must be cleaned out of the heart to make room for it, and who is to do that?

In the orchard among the apples, are two white wonders of old cherry trees. The grass grows high around and under them, green with that green of living, emerald fire, which, they say, is nowhere else but in an English spring, or sometimes in Australia, just after a bush fire, when the herbage begins to spring again. Each long green blade is tipped to-day with a white flower, lightly hung, trembling as it hangs. It is a child's fairyland, so light and lovely is the flowery grass with nipped off blossoms, like fallen snow between. But the sparrows did it—the trees are full of them; chattering and scolding, and vigorously pecking. It is rather clever, the neat way they just nip out and eat the succulent little knob underneath the

A Beautiful World

calyx, letting the blossom—quite intact otherwise, with only a little round hole in the middle—fall on to the points of grass beneath; and there it hangs. It is in the daytime all their business is done. But come again at sunset; stand under the enchanted trees and look up. There, indeed, is a "Beautiful World," branching up and up into the blue. Thousands of flowers are gone, but countless myriads remain. The brown branches are hidden under the white that swathes them round. It is as though unseen hands held up long wreaths against the sky. Pale amber from the fading west suffuses half the cherry tree above, while lower down, shadows from the old garden wall veil all in grey, the greyness of an evening mist, cold and dim, contrasted with the dream-light beyond.

Those fair, white garlands in all their soft purity of tone, seem to wind and reach up into vast unending heights, and as the eye follows them, you are for the moment possessed by some nameless feeling, by something like an infinite longing that cannot be said in words. It is but for one bewildered moment—and then the cherry tree, covered with its own glory of sweet earthly bloom and blossom stands there before you—itself again.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

And yesterday, growing close beside the corner of a plain old white vicarage house near the church, suddenly appeared a rose-pink tree. I had never before known that tree in April; and for years past, if seen at all, it had seemed a poor and shabby tree. The delicate rosy flush of its abundant, large, half-double April blossoming, breathing on the air a perfume quite ineffable, and every flower-laden spray set also with pink pearls of buds, was a surprise to fill the heart with gladness. I think this *Pyrus spectabilis flore pleno* threw into the shade my own white, simple cherry tree, and even a group of standard peach, in which—before I saw it—my soul rejoiced.

Yet who among the builders of houses would think twice about destroying such a tree, if its place were wanted for any ugliness of piled-up bricks and mortar? A beautiful world is about the last thing that, as a rule, the many think about or care for. A cheap world, a money-getting world, that is the ideal nowadays; and to secure this end, no lovely thing in Nature is held sacred; neither the life of any wild bird or beast, nor any charm of field or woodland. Devastation such as this is common enough; happening every day. I was not long since told of a house and garden near Walham Green,

A Beautiful World

which existed up to within a few years ago, and now is absolutely gone; blotted out by streets so that its very site cannot be found. That garden was entirely filled with the finest "specimen" trees, all well grown and very large, and many of them but little known, or unique in this country. Of not one of those trees has the life been spared.

There is a green lane dear to my childhood, that once I knew. In memory's picture gallery hangs the likeness of it; and often in thought I wander along it as of old, from end to end. From my father's door, the road went past the carpenter's yard and the tiny dame's school, and the old brewery, with its gay little front garden, along by the green hedgerows. The sunny side of the bank used to be blue with speedwell and bright with stellaria in their season; on the other side lay a grassy space, where little wild vines with their slender tendrils might here and there be found amongst the herbage—remnants of vineyards, that abounded near in the old times; passing the fir grove, where here and there a gate led to some house by the riverside, till the long lane turned under deep-shadowed elms by the village church, and reaches of "silver-streaming Thames" appeared. I would not willingly ever again, save in the spirit, pass along that green lane.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

I know it to be now built up on every side, crossed by the line—noisy, dusty, desecrated. They tell me such things must be, for people must travel quickly, and houses they must have to live in. But at least my garden here is safe; safe for my lifetime, be the end far or near.

In a garden there should be no gloom, no dulness, no damp, neglected spot. There, all should be brightness and delight, and at every turn a surprise, an interest, something unexpected. And from between trim yew hedges and spaces of sunlit lawn, your steps should follow ever some gentle reach of terrace, or winding grass-walk into orchard or hazel close, or wilderness of cedarn shade and hawthorn and young beech, aglow in their season about the roots of them with orange berberis and periwinkle. And there should be no stern master gardener; but one who knows how to deal tenderly with all his children, and how to *let them be*. And then, almost unawares will come patches of the sweetest things, self-sown about the borders, looking secure and happy. Little companies of white violets in spring, will surprise you ever and anon with their perfumed freshness. Many-coloured primroses will smile at you as they nestle at a rose-bush root. Forget-me-not and wood-strawberries, and little

A Beautiful World

lilac gems of Virginian stock, will shelter under your old walls, and none will say them nay. No rough hand essays to check the briony if it choose by chance to clasp some tall tree-stem. Only to that lovely criminal, the bind-weed, would we be cruel. She, alas! must be firmly repressed, or she would soon overmaster us. The plants in such a garden, like living sentient beings, seem to know that all are welcome. They and the gardener understand one another, and there reigns amongst them peace and prosperity.

The birds too are "let be," and every bit of harm they do is repaid a hundred-fold by the joy of their song, and the life their merry manners impart to the garden.

But now the mid-day sun burns in the cup of the blue gentian, and who can attempt to describe its loveliness? A little square raised plot, with a sun-dial surrounded by white iris in the centre, is deep blue with gentian of the Alps; the garden is full of them besides.

And without plan or intention there arrive the loveliest contrasts. Here in a kitchen-garden border, there are gentians under a group of star anemone; lapis lazuli and scarlet flames. There, in the rockery, the blue peeps from under a tumble of little rose-cistus and pink phlox; or again, the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

sov'ran blue contrasts with gleaming yellow of *Arnebia echioides* (the Prophet's flower); while, perchance, a yellow butterfly on vagrant wing floats wavering by. Yet that small strip of unkept turf bordering a beech alley at the other end of the garden is after all, to my thinking, at times the very happiest part. There, wild primroses have seeded, and the grass is set with pale yellow rosettes; sometimes an orchis crops up, or a brown or white primrose or chequered fritillary, and there are wood anemones, and dog violets, and wild blue hyacinths.

A little bit of wildness in the midst of cultivation, a little wilderness within the garden's bounds, is very precious. And the charm of it is enhanced if your paradise lies in the midst of a great plain of cultivated land surrounded by railroads and sown with great staring advertisements; and the cuckoo-flowers that love moist margins of the meadow grass just beyond your smooth-shorn lawns may be full of a sweet, strange delight.

IV

The Haunted Wood



The wood is never alone. In the trees, among the branches, abides an unseen Presence. The voice we heard is not the complaining of the wind, nor leaves dancing in the breeze. Old thoughts, old memories, old times, crowd upon the heart—in the wood.

IV

The Haunted Wood

WEIRDLY human in outward seeming are the trees of the earth. Glad in sunshine and how despairing in the gloom!

This was the thought that the moaning wind in the branches of two trees before the window soon lulled to sleep. And the reflex of a dream—dreamed in the long-lost years—steals back, like the singing of a bird before the dawn, like the whisper of reeds before a lake of shadows. . . . It is the dream of a well-loved young fir-wood I knew. Not grand nor beautiful, it had all the sweetness of childhood, the rejoicing strength and fulness of youth. The moss grew in lowly beauty round the young spruce's feet; each lovely moss-tribe bearing some peculiar sign and badge of its race: tiny emerald cups, minute balls and seeds, countless points of living green. And underneath the moss, in dark labyrinths, unseen, self-centred in their own small cares, moved another world of life—a world of busy insect

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

life, a ceaseless round of existence circling on and on, far down out of human ken, till the ant is a giant to the myriads around, ever and ever lessening, ever more minute, more blindly careless and unknowing of aught save their own small selves. At ten years old, how delicious was that young fir-wood! Green and aromatic, each tree of it well replenished with branches down to the very ground; full of grace and growth, and fairy mazes through and through. And now, it is ten years older. And the little wood will long since have begun to show bare and black, and none would care to dream there now. . . .

Beautiful is the forest in every season, at every hour of all the year. Beautiful in the deep hush of midsummer, beautiful in autumn, when the trees burn like lamps of gold—intensely beautiful beneath the winter starlight. Look up into the starry night through barred branches fretted overhead, and own the dim mystery of these unleaved forest aisles is worth a thousand days of summer pride. The limes and sycamores soon ceased striving with the wind, and the dream grew thin, and the little fir-wood slept one more within the grey shades of memory.

Commonly speaking a wood is a wood.



SUNLESS WEATHER

The Haunted Wood

It is Sylva: a collection of trees. They may fall through natural decay, or lightning may rend them, or the woodman's axe may fell them, or hordes of small untiring beetles may sap the life out of them—in places where the gun has left no woodpecker alive to save them—or, by stress of weather, the whole wood may be swept down. And then the ground will be re-planted, and in time a new wood will have grown up. The Haunted Wood changes—changes. Every year, year by year, it changes. Once on a time it was old; century after century it had stood, dark and gloomy, with great red-stemmed pines; the broad brown track through the wood littered with autumn leaves, or shining smoothly with summer rain of pine needles. It was the work of one cruel night, when the storm uprooted half the wood. For the space of thrice three twelve-months, from end to end the wood lay bare. Broken trees of deathful grey, knurled and scarred and rugged, grey-bearded with long hanks of lichen hanging dismally; or lying prone, with gaunt up-standing roots. The old path was obliterated, and no new one made, for none cared to cross a spot so desolate. The deep recesses of the wood now lay bare, and there was full daylight where sweet shades had

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

used to be. Yet all the time green rushes grew strong and cool in many an oozy hollow. And over all the place hints there were as of some unseen movement, of green things and seeds under the earth—things that knew the sun had found them out, through the darkness underground. Also, little shoots of deciduous trees began to spring. Yet these outward signs of strong, impelling inner life did not make the place less cheerless, rather the grimness of it grew.

It is told of a man who wandered there, after some strayed sheep, in the long-drawn twilight of a midsummer evening, that near the farther confines of the Haunted Wood he beheld strange things. A long procession of wild beasts passed silently before his eyes—elephants, tigers, giraffes, camels, lions. He watched them as they filed on, turning neither left nor right, faring north between him and the clear, cold sky-line. And all those living creatures, half-transparent and wholly rainbow-coloured, seemed as though they were but appearances of painted glass, like moving colours in some old church window: violet and blue and amber and fire-colour. The man who saw stood still rooted to the earth, until the last strange beast had passed. Then he forgot all about

The Haunted Wood

his wandering sheep, turned and went away to his house like one in a dream. And silent as in a dream, it is said, he existed, until the end came before next new moon arose. Visions of many coloured beasts are known elsewhere. In the Castle of the Isle of Man there is a bed-chamber where they who sleep have awoke at early dawn to behold the self-same sight. Visionary rainbow-tinted creatures marching in long procession around the white walls of the room. Who can tell how these things are? Who can gauge the mystery of the unknown *anima*, the indwelling secret power within the outside shell of being? We know not nor shall ever know. . . .

The latest change in the Haunted Wood is beneficent and thorough. It has renewed its youth like the eagle. Dead trees have been cut up and dragged away. Not a sign of old decay is suffered to remain. No barren roots now lift horned heads above the brake-fern. Scarce any cleft, broken trees remain—hooded forms that seemed to come and go as evening drew on! No trace is left of that other, older wood. All now is fresh and young and joyous: full of the sweet mystery of young summer, when she empties lapfuls of wild-flowers all over the earth. From whence comes this delicious

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

verdure where all had so long been austere and barren? Last year we could see without hindrance the whole, as it were, of the desolate wood. To-day, fragrant glades and closes of wild copse lead—who knows whither? You are only aware for the moment of a sense of boundless distance, as you wander on, till suddenly checked by a straight fence dividing off the heath and open fields. In the place where ruin and mis-luck once set their seal as it were for evermore, smiles the green shiver of fresh leaves. It is as a garden of flowers. Sparkling patches of tiny potentilla, growing quite flat down in the moss and grass, red clouds of seeding sorrel, and short sweet grass damasked all among with trefoil of wood-sorrel, delicately green. The Haunted Wood, with this its latest enchantment, is pleasant, full of charm, and woos to waste one's time there, whether at "brim of day" or quiet eventide. All along on either side the shadowy way the grass is spangled with blue veronica. Veronica is such a devoted little sun-lover; even within the shade, it will sometimes make shift to be blue and glad. Blue with green is one of nature's commonest, loveliest contrasts; but green should always have the mastery, as in *Anchusa semper-virens*, where the contrast is so exquisite of

The Haunted Wood

green, alive with myriad tiny touches of brilliant blue. So, too, with veronica when dispersed among the grass: the green is as a hundred to one with the number of the blue, yet it is only the blue that attracts the eye.

On the western borders of the wood once stood three old beech-trees; only two remain. They are weather-worn and under-sized as compared with the great full-grown "mast-bearing tree," as we know him in his prime; but as yet they are untouched by the axe, unbroken by the storm. A tender young growth of feathery birch is closing up so fast around that soon the old trees will be held of no account, swallowed up in an alien crowd. Fate is against these two poor beeches. The north has certainly undone them, though not "with a sleety whistle through them"; it was only the north winds of June, for the edges of their leaves are curled and rusted only on the north side. The clean-cut stump between the two, of what was once a third, serves now for the wayfarer's seat. Five tall, half-unbranched, half-lifeless pines stand also there, in front of the beech, as before a judgment-seat arraigned, like five lost giants before the woodland bar, to give account for their sorry state. The naked stems stand upright, unclad, in shreds of rough grey lichen. Bare

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

limbs stretch heavenwards in seeming tragic, vain appeal. Beyond them, in lines of perfect beauty, the new-born forest melts into the distance.

Light murmurs floating round among the leaves seem to question the accused: "Where are your friends? Why are ye so alone?" But no accusation comes from "the chair of judgment"; no answer from those five shattered thralls. Quite irrelevantly round the poor, wind-scathed beeches themselves, rustles on, a stave from the old ballad:

"'Tis merry, 'tis merry in good greenwood,
Where mavis and merle are singing. . . ."

Sitting here under the beeches I forget the grey Scotch firs standing so forlornly dumb, and begin to remember a curious story the poet and essayist Lowell used to tell of a "Witch Farm" in America. The place is a forest near New York, at some distance, but within a walk from the city. On the edge of the forest a farm will at times appear, which no one remembers to have ever seen before, unless they happen to be among the few who *have* seen. There is no one about the farm, no sound is heard, yet there are signs of busy occupation. The door is open, empty milk-pans lean against the wall, newly-cleaned pails and dairy uten-

The Haunted Wood

sils and butter-churns are set out to dry; clothes hang on the line in a little drying-ground—all looks as if the farmer's wife or servant had but just gone indoors, or gone out meaning to return in a few minutes. Whoever thus chances on the farm seldom stops long to look. He will pass on, thinking to himself: "I don't seem to remember that farm. I must inquire about it in town." In town not a soul knows anything about it, and never will that person see the farm again, however often he may return to look for it. Then others will go out to seek the Witch Farm. Over and over again will they pass and repass the very spot where it had been seen, retracing their steps, and puzzling and saying: "It must be there; we have mistaken the way." They are few, indeed, to whom the spectral farm has shown itself. Lowell himself once saw it. On the verge of the wood he passed a homestead which appeared precisely as had been described—the milking-pails and dairy things all about round the open door; the linen hanging out to dry on the clothes-line. Mr. Lowell saw it all, and passed on without thinking; then suddenly stopped short with a feeling of something strange, turned and sauntered slowly back, in order to look again at the place. But no house at all was there, and he was unable to find again the exact

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

spot where it had been. He had seen the Witch Farm.

In the Haunted Wood one never comes upon a mystic homestead, yet well I know a garden lies hid in its innermost shades. In June the growing copse is wont to give out its fragrance in the sunshine, and it happened I was led to follow down a narrow, green alley, sloping ruggedly to where some ruined remnants of the older wood survive. A wide-winged, silvery, pale-green moth floated on before, till just where the thicket grew more dense the large wings closed as it settled on the under-side of a leaf, whilst I drew near to get a clearer view of the lovely thing. The maze of slender branchlets suddenly parted in a little arch of mountain-ash, rich in red, ripe berries—though, indeed, their time of ripening was not yet—and, just beyond the rowans, lay a garden. Woodland and winding paths and pale-green moth were not; instead, an open lawn filled full of light and colour. Above, the Eye of Heaven, in a cloudless depth of light, shone down upon a mist-walled garden. Countless flowers, all dewy and shadowless, rejoicing as flowers rejoice only when the day is young. One step within that magic circle, one breathless glance, then the shimmering mist arose and spread, and blotted out garden and sun-

The Haunted Wood

shine and flowers. So swiftly did the vision vanish, there was not time to note the exact spot where it had been. There seemed to be a glassy pool in the centre of the flowers, and a streaming of blue to meet the pool; but whether the blue were running waters, or a shoal of bright-winged birds at play, or troops of azure butterflies fluttering down to sip at the margin of the pool—who can say? The vision passed away as quickly as it came. And it is certain that the flowers were “garden-flowers.” There was nothing of the inconstant look of wild-flowers; nothing of the wild-flower aspect that none mistake. The flowers I saw were chequered pink and purple, most richly doubled and redoubled in their pride. So the young copse once more closed in on one side and the other of the narrow, green way. . . .

Dreams are said to be “the interlude that fancy makes”; and that gay impictured garden was but a visionary interlude. Yet at once I fell to thinking out the plan of a forest garden. The whole world is his who plans. “The plan” may be of the wildest and impossible to realise. Still it exists, if in the mind it be drawn out. It is a reality, more solid perhaps than anything that is actually made real. To begin with, the forest must be like “The Haunted Wood,”

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and none other; therefore, it must be in Scotland. And if rarer and more sensitively delicate plants are desired, such as would naturally be unsuited to so wild a spot, then must be found another sort of wood-garden in some more genial clime.

Mine shall be a garden of iris, the flower of poetry, the flower of the mystic three, the flower of reticence. Rich in velvet colour, beyond words to describe, it is yet, above all others in the garden, the flower of silence. The iris keeps counsel with herself. Her close-swathed bud gives no promise, brags not, tells no tales of loveliness to be. The single, slender, erect stalk bears one flower, whose sister bud awaits in patience the hour when her turn also shall come. From under the petalled tip, as soon as its day is over, steals out a new beauty into bloom, while the other fades and is not. When iris is white, it is as the whiteness of moonlight shining on the snow. And the time of her blooming is in June and July.

This, then, shall be the flower of our woodland garden—English iris, *Xiphoides*, and Spanish *Xiphium*, with infrequent clumps between of the beautiful, broad-leaved flag, or German iris.

The Haunted Wood

XIPHIIUM XIPHIOIDES

The plan of the garden planned that day in the Haunted Wood is a shell or spiral. After passing through a brown, dim grove of great old trees, a little burn is crossed, and at once we are in the midst of a dense young growth of self-sown betula or birch. Then, after following a wild, uncertain path, our iris-spiral shall begin. A long, curving, close-shorn grassy way, hewn out through the thick of the underwood, curving spirally like the shell of a snail, or, rather, like an ancient ammonite. No design is lovelier than the spiral; none so primeval! The selvedge or edge along the outer side is enriched with iris. This selvedge may be about eighteen inches wide, and the green way six or eight feet. And since English iris want coolness about the feet, and either completely die down in summer, or at best the narrow leaves grow yellow, there must be an intermingling of the finer and more delicately made wild grasses. Or scattered seeds of low growing summer flowers will keep up the interest, and keep the border full of colour. Spanish iris (*Xiphium*) differs scarcely from the English, save only in the outline of her lovely flower, which is even more exquisitely

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

refined and small. It also blooms earlier, and for perfect growth must receive full sunlight. Wherever the spiral curves most freely catch the sun, there *Xiphium* should do well; not forgetting that always the bluest are loveliest, and more true in colour to the brilliant blue flashes of wild iris seen so often by travellers in Spain between flowery borders of the railroad. English iris, *Xiphoides*, must, however, chiefly fill the border, and thus the spiral will be long lengths of purple, blue, and white all the way, with shining breaks of golden yellow, or mottled grey, or lavender, or silvery splashed with violet. Then, as the winding track sweeps round, its convolutions end at last in a small clear pool. A single thread of water rises glittering from the centre. The pool should be full of fish, so that perhaps a heron might be enticed to take his stand there and keep solemn watch for hours among the great, splendid *Kämpferi*, or Japanese iris; or a marble Naiad might dream forever on the brink. One thing must be noted; it is this: the beauty of English or Spanish iris is never enhanced by undue crowding. They will, of themselves, fill out in time. And the thrifty, thinly furnished line, with sometimes four or five together, sometimes only two, will prove

The Haunted Wood

more full of charm and interest than a space more thickly planted.

In how many gardens of the day is evident an almost painful striving for effect! To achieve "masses of colour," "wonderful effects," is a chief aim; whilst the endless lovely forms of individual leaf and flower are unnoticed and unthought of.

Round the heron's pool—or the Naiad's haunt—must be disposed a fringe of broad-flowered Japanese iris. It blooms later than the others, and thus when these are done will come as a beautiful surprise; and the colour, magnificently purple, shall contrast grandly with the taller *Ochroleuca monnieri*, standing near in raiment of wrought gold. With our joy in her presence, too often we forget that the iris season is very brief. Before July the feast is over, or will soon be over. Some other flower must be ready to fill her place. Blue nemophila streaming round might be some consolation; or streaks of crimson linum, or some other bright attractive seedling; simply as lovely makeshifts for the moment. . . .

Although the iris shell, so easily planned, lives ever with us as a vision of beauty greatly to be desired, there yet remains an abiding consciousness of its visionary nature; a feeling that such a design, simple though it be,

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

could never be carried out, and that it must always be a dream and nothing more. Yet—

“ With the dream foregone, foregone,
The deed foreborne for ever,
The worm regret will canker on,
And time will turn him never ! ”

And as the beautiful iris spiral fades, another garden, the same with a difference—one which might be found less hard to realise—is already planned in its stead. They, in whose souls the Queen of Flowers reigns pre-eminent, whose desire is ever to “the rose, the rose,” might devise for some English woodland, in the heart of its deep hazel copse, a spiral rose garden. A fair place of well-clipped, green-leaf walls. Here would be jutting capes of juniper or yew to give variety, half hiding, half disclosing a new surprise, something brilliant and unexpected at every turn. A splendour of white campanula grow joyfully in the narrow selvedge ; or columbine, blue and orange and pink—crushed-strawberry colour—each floret very slender and innocent of any hint of doubleness. Variety and loveliness unnumbered shines all around their rose spiral. But the rose—the rose must be supreme. Here no “rich-bosomed garden rose” may have leave to live. Only such as Penzance briars of

The Haunted Wood

many shades, and wandering Ayrshires, pink roamer (*Wichuriana*) wildly spangled—and Idèale, if she do but consent to fling her flower-laden streamers about the tangled walls, with many another. Single or half-double roses, named or nameless, crimson or blush-pink or purest white, shall all be dear to us. There is hardly a limit to the colours of the roses winding round and round the rose shell. Yet even of these not over many. For our law is “ane few meyne”; or, as one might say, a few of sorts. Then two narrow vistas may be carved somewhere through the outmost leaf-walls, and paved with turquoise of blue forget-me-not or pale gold of prim-roses. Beyond, blue glimpses of a hill country very far off, with clouds of rosiest willow herb between. The last whorl of the rose spiral is a green circle of turf. And on the green stands a small, open, white temple, like a little reminiscence of a Temple of Vesta. On one side low-growing roses—Bengal or red Damascus—surge up to the very base of the slender, white shafts; while opposite is only the green turf between the temple and a receding line of flowers. To follow on alone along these wild-wood spirals of rose or iris is to pursue some blissful mystery of tranquil pleasure. . . .

Somewhere exists, or once existed, a pen-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and-ink drawing by Rossetti—"How they met themselves." Two lovers in the bright bloom of youth and happiness, walking together in some wild ferny place, on a sudden perceive *themselves* approaching. The youth and the maiden start back appalled at the haggard, sin-scored faces that met them thus, prophetic of the future—of their own similitude in life's hereafter. Something like this idea in the rough may be found in a manuscript family house-book of over a hundred years ago, along with recipes for rose-water, almond cakes, &c., headed thus: "To make a Ghost in a Garden Wilderness." And thus the recipe begins: "Find some rather long-shaped, damp-disfigured mirror, or other polished lucid substance—the worse condition of it the better for your purpose. Fix the glasse warily at a certain distance off the footpath amidst of wild thicknesse of underwood and weeds and leaves in such manner as half to hide and half display it. Any person using the footpath and chancing to turn his eyes that way, sees as it were a Phantom; not knowing that it is but a vain image of himself." A childish conceit, one that must never find room in *our* gardens of sedate delight!

"Let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings," were the words that seemed to come and go in the

The Haunted Wood

mind's ear at one special spot near the entering in of a bower-path, burrowed through copse and scrub, not far from an outmost corner of the wood. The threads of memory are often far to find, and often her roots are buried deep, so the secret of the haunting reiteration long lay hidden. One day it so happened that, entering the embowering shade,—suddenly I knew. And the remembered sunshine of long ago, “when all the world was young,” again shone down upon a tall house-roof, and four gilded vanes flashed back the gleam. Four golden doves turned east and west and north and south, gently veering with the winds of summer. All day in the blue of heaven they seemed to hover above the roof. Through the storm and the tempest their wings glowed fitfully; glowing even at dead of night, when the whole house slept, in watch and ward of the golden doves. Again there was a day when all the world was young and summer shone fair upon the roof; and our poet host, Lord Lytton, led his friends along garden ways hedged in with glistening laurel—the pride of the place—to the water of Knebworth. From the margin of the lake they marked the long ripple and liquid shadows, and then it was the poet lightly quoted: “Let's sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

death of kings." And thus the gilded vanes and little unimportant scene as the friends sat down upon the grass by Knebworth lake, come back years after, and the word spoken so long ago is whispered to-day in innumerable foliage of the Haunted Wood—but how, or why, who knows? Yet there is no unfathomable mystery, for had not a packet of old letters been only very lately opened and read once more?—after lying lost for forty years! And one was penned under the roof of the golden doves. The ink may be faded, but the thoughts are fresh as yesterday: "I wonder whether anybody lives the life he or she meant to live; and sometimes doubt whether the failure of felicity in this life should not rebuke rather than encourage our hopes of another. When a child spoils his toy, you take it away from him. You don't give him a better one to break. The world that has been given us seems so much more beautiful and fruitful of enjoyment than the lives we live in it. Is the defect in the individual or society? I don't think it true that birds of a feather flock together. They only come across each other now and then, and seldom keep long in company. If the dull, wicked, and the selfish-hearted are found in troops, it is only because their number is so great that they cannot avoid

The Haunted Wood

each other. They would if they could ; preferring the society of brighter and gentler natures, were it only for the pleasure of tormenting them. I have slipped, however, into a stream of talk, which, unlike other streams, will certainly *not* grow either brighter or gentler the further it runs on.—R. L.” *

And yet another letter, of about the same date, written from the South of France, tells of a forgotten Genius. Forgotten? No, that could not be ; but so long ago ! and so much has been since ! The letter is not very long. Here it is.

“ CANNES, *April* 1867.

“ MY DEAR R.,—Now, while my whole heart is full of the enchantment and the melody, I must sit down and write quick to you, and tell you about it, and everything else must wait. You know I had been invited by Lady M. F—— to come to her villa and hear Jenny Lind. The day came, and though it might have been more prudent to have stayed quiet at home, I went. The room was full of people ; the invalid *élite* of the place ; all ranged along both sides of the drawing-room. There were the Lumsdens, Mr. and Lady something Edwards, Fer-

* Robert Lytton.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

gusons, Des Vœux, &c., &c. About seventeen or eighteen altogether; and I, being still weak, and only lately come out of a state of such miserable disquiet, I felt the atmosphere dreadfully hot and suffocating, and things appeared to me flat and ugly. Lady T—— seemed under these conditions to be the most melancholy person I had ever seen in my life! Poor sick thing! The Edwards' looked haggard and worn, sharing a glass of barley-water between them. Old Sands I perceived to have one leg certainly shorter than the other. Old Lady P—— looked vacant, and her pretty daughter quite plain. Somebody else squinted frightfully, and my eye was caught by the hideous grey boots worn by another lady. Some one else showed me a badly painted amateur miniature, and looked huffed when I refused to rave about it. Mr. Harte, when I unfortunately asked about his illuminations, handed me an ugly old *portefeuille* filled with old patterns and faded photographs, and page after page did he turn for me to admire, each one innocent of all beauty or originality. Lady T—— coughed and murmured on about how she had never moved since November and was 'sick to death of the place,' and how several dear friends were in a very bad way, &c., &c.

The Haunted Wood

Then the tea was strong, and the flowers few and *passées*. And in the midst of all this Jenny Lind slipt into the room (without a bonnet), and I thought to myself, 'Oh, what a cross-looking ordinary person you are!' Her dress was, however, lovely. A simple pale silk trimmed with bright blue. But oh, the cross face above it! Poor M—— had much ado to bring her round. She sat down beside her, and devoted herself, and smoothed and softened. 'Why, you told me two or three people! And here's the whole of—collected!' 'Only the invalids, I assure you,' M—— sweetly rejoined, 'and those who were not at the concert.' 'There's the Rolfes. I saw them there!' 'Oh, but they are so fond of music!' And so she soothed and quieted, till at last the Nightingale was on the music-stool, and then she put her hand on M——'s and said, 'I never would have done it for anyone else!'

"Then she began. . . . She sang *Non mi credei*. She sang it so beautifully, she could not have done it better in a London concert-room. She scarcely opened her mouth, and almost you could not tell whence came the tones of such marvellous beauty.

"As she sang—gradually, by degrees—the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

lines of her face softened. The brow smoothed, while a fulness and a tenderness of the whole expression shone out of every feature, rounding it, as it were, and turning its very hardness into a strength of sweetness, if you know what I mean.

"She ended, and people fidgeted and whispered together. 'How lovely!' they said. But easily could I divine the unsatisfied sort of wholly unsympathetic feeling the whole thing must have been to her. She sang again: 'The Three Ravens,' from *Percy's Reliques*. I am sorry I could not quite hear the words, owing to her slight foreign accent. It is an ancient ballad of Love and Death, and Misery, I believe—ending, 'there never was such hound and hawk and friend.' A wild little refrain ends each verse. Then some one asked for 'John Anderson.' I assure you her face was beautiful, as she smiled and made a little shake of her head. 'John Anderson, my jo . . .' No music; only, with the very last syllable, a gentle chord. As for me, all my mind was full of her own Swedish songs I had heard of in old days, 'so plaintive, wild and uncommon: the words so pretty and so fanciful and fairy-like,' and among them one of the only ones I know, 'Love smiles no more.' (You have the music of it.) So I tried to make M——

The Haunted Wood

know which I meant, and even hummed the air, which she cleverly caught at once and carried to Madame Lind. But no; she would not understand. She was just a little snubby, I thought! 'But supposing I never sang it, I can't remember it!' However, all the people then wanted a Swedish song. So down she sat once more, and began a wild strange prelude, almost like a Swiss *jodel*, then softly subsiding into the pretty melody you know, the one we all love. Oh, how delighted I was! She sang with all her whole heart, the last two notes prolonged into a humming kind of whisper, then swelling out into a long and most lovely fulness—

“ ‘ Birds on the branches
Still their soft lays sing,
Flowers on the green boughs
Sweetly breathe of Spring;
But to me is changed and sad
All that once could make me glad,
Ever musing, still refusing
Thought of all but thee.’ ”

“ And this ended the concert. And she had become quite herself, cheery and pleasant. And she and I had a nice chat about art and about that Norwegian painter whose name I always forget, and of Swedish sunsets, which my sister had described to me. And then the T——’s came up and I left her.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

"There was a tremendous commotion outside, and everybody ran to the windows to look. It was our carriage. The *cocher* (who was mad or merry I think), had run the wheel first on one gate-post stone, then, when heaved off that, on to t'other. We got safely off in time. Old Lady P—— said, 'Oh, I thought you had gone away long ago!' She certainly is a little funny!

"And that is all I can tell you of this little piece of a day in my life, which to me was a thing so enchanting I shall remember it forever. What I've said can give you no idea of the wonderful pleasure it was, listening to Jenny Lind. And then the knowledge that this was that world-famed creature one had heard of and longed to see, for over twenty years! I was able to say to her just one little word at parting: only that 'I never should forget.' And we made a cordial grasp of the hands and felt good friends. . . .

"(Our *cocher* was certainly drunk, but we got home, full gallop all the way.) I have not suffered from my escapade, and am even feeling stronger this morning.—Yours always,
E. V. B."

"When the daughter of the Voice is silent,
Lo, the son of the Ink speaks."

—*Persian saying.*

The Haunted Wood

Long years before the date of that letter from the French *châlet*, Jenny Lind had been to me as a vision, as the revelation of a dream. My elder sister had stayed for a year or two in Stockholm with a brother, who was at that time Secretary of Legation under Sir Thomas Cartwright. She used frequently to write home about Jenny Lind, describing her and the Swedish songs she sang, "so plaintive, wild and uncommon : the words so pretty and so fanciful and fairy-like." Jenny had just made her first appearance at Court, and became at once a favourite. The letters told of her charm, her voice. I was not eighteen at that time, and these letters stirred the heart and inspired an immense enthusiasm. When my sister returned to us from Sweden, she brought with her, I remember, packed in one of those little chip boxes, once common enough but now seldom seen, a sort of tiny, tin Court toy. There were the King and Queen of Sweden, sitting in two state arm-chairs, six rather dowdy maids of honour and ladies of the Court, some tall officers in uniform and the clergyman in his black gown, with several little models of empty tin chairs with shiny crimson seats. All these were supposed to be arranged in a circle, while in the centre stood the figure of

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

a young girl in white, with a wreath of pink roses on her head, and holding up a fan. This was Jenny Lind singing for the first time before royalty.

Since that distant "long ago" two generations have played their little games with my box of tin chairs and courtiers, their Swedish Majesties, and the great singer, and now it has passed away among other bygone playthings; and passed away are the courtiers and maids of honour and stately dames, passed with the spell of the wonderful voice.

Gone also are the letters that seemed so illuminated with praise of the youthful "Jenny." And afterwards, when she had come to England and made her *début* in London, and when the world went mad about the "Swedish Nightingale," I was settled far down in the country, out of the way of all these things. I never had the joy to hear her until that one magic hour at Cannes, and never after.

Sir William Boxall (at that time Director of the National Gallery) was a very old friend of ours, and in the summer often used to journey down to Somerset to stay with us—to paint, and be refreshed with the deep quiet of our green country. And often in those days he would talk of his favourite "Jenny Lind," and would try to

The Haunted Wood

describe the artless grace of her bearing, her gestures, her little frequent, unstudied action, which as an artist he never tired of watching with delight. There was one especial "pose" that seemed to come to her the oftenest, and quite naturally as she sang. Our friend would do his best to tell of that attitude, so that we might imagine something of the charm of it. She would, he said, stand with her head a little on one side, resting the chin in her left hand, her right placed in the left palm. Impossible to be written down so as to make it understood. Do any now survive, in the mind's eye of whose memory yet lives the image of Jenny Lind as she was in those departed years?

The old ideals fade. Time steals them from us; the darkness of death receives them.

In art, whether of painting or of song, for many of us belonging to a distant past all is now so different, so changed that, as it were, we scarcely seem to know our way, passing through the modern picture galleries or listening in concert-halls. Some of us think now, with undying regret, of "the Hand" of masters who loved and followed Nature, and who felt so well with their clear vision how to portray the hidden soul of her—of the unforgotten grace and sweetness

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of the vocalist who, so many years ago, charmed the world with "the sound of a voice that is still."

At noon the Haunted Wood lay bare its charm to the golden prime of an August day. The myriad-leaved underwood, flecked with too early yellow, veiled as in a light mirage the full glory of the sun. Rushes and sedge, and moss low-lying on the earth, had drunk so deep of sunshine that stalks and leaves burned green as though illumined with an inner fire of life. Sitting in an alcove of wild raspberries, reddening in their own shade of white-lined leaves, and smelling already of raspberry jam—the silence and the sunshine and the ripe fruit called back to mind a certain dear old house of former days. Up the long passages, in those old hot Julys, fragrant whiffs of raspberry jam from the kitchen would sometimes steal right into the wainscotted parlour. Mingling with the smell of sun-warmed fruit thrilled a sense of something sweeter far. An aroma as of white jasmine with ten thousand wild flowers of the woods, the rarest fragrance of the sweetest flower, dear memory's keenest stimulant, the marsh-loving butterfly orchis, came wafted from some secret corner of the wild. Yet hardly like the dreamy fragrance of an orchis, it

The Haunted Wood

was but a suggested fragrance—a momentary thought-scent such as bracken in the rain gives out, wafted from some woodland far away. A scent that made the faces of long-lost friends shine out of dim mists of other days, and the sound of their voices seem nigh at hand. . . . Once more we had met (in the rain) at the thatched hut—the scene of many a happy meeting—among the firs on St. George's Hill, long years ago. The hut looked down a steep ferny slope, green just then with the glory of midsummer, sparkling with midsummer rain. There were Adelaide Sartoris, and Browning, and Leighton, and Mrs. Brookfield, with her fair-haired Magdalen, and others; and it was Adelaide led the laughter and the talk. And then she sang a song she loved—"The Music of the Sea"—and then she read aloud. William Morris had not at that time very long begun to publish; and his style was hardly understood. It was one of his slighter poems that was read aloud that day, in Adelaide's usual dramatic manner. The refrain of "Two Red Roses across the Moon," was given with a look and intonation irresistibly funny. And then Browning told story after story. Only one of his stories, trivial as it is, survives after all these years! It was about the deaf old lady's tea-party

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

after a visit to the Zoo. A shy young man next her had to say something into her trumpet. So he said, "Did you see the elephant?" "Did I see *what?*" "The elephant!" "What?" He tried a little louder: "The elephant!" "Oh, the tea-pot!" "No, the elephant!" "The tea-pot!" "The elephant!!!" he shrieked. "The tea-pot?" And so it went on amid a dead pause round the tea-table, till the miserable youth jumped up and fled the scene. It was the way Browning had of telling a thing that told and roused the merriment ringing from our hut. And so ran on the stories and the mirth, till the rain had ceased and the sun broke out, and all the party went out and followed Mrs. Sartoris, while she and Leighton plunged down into the sea of fern—in youth who cares for wet or dry? And all the company followed and got wet through, and sought the winding homeward paths, and went their ways back to London; and the well-known voices died away. It is the moment to put on the ring of secret thought, when I remember:

"All the friends so knit together,
I've seen around me fall like leaves in wintry weather;"

to forget the sun-lit shades and sweet wood-

The Haunted Wood

land sounds: to know that "the only thing in life worth thinking about is death."

Not in the Haunted Wood—it is too freshly new. Not in the little fir-wood, still in its first fragrant youth. Not there, but in some old secluded forest track, sacred perchance to a great brotherhood of immemorial oak; or in lonely places murmurous with music of "the voiceful pine," where beneath the trees the grass grows smooth and shivers in the wind. There, when long shafts of sunset steal between the trees, and birds are silent, in such an hour, to the inner mind of one who muses there—it may be "musing upon the days of his youth, the glad days and the solemn days"—at times will come the sense of some strange spirit crisis, and to him the Present will seem to fail and fall away, while the Past comes back intensely near, lying rolled together, as it were, in a little heap that the hand might gather up. Within the compass of the forest glade, such an one at such a time will know the agony of a mysterious influence, the supreme influence of Nature when we are alone with her. Like a dream it holds us, drawing to us from the hard substance of the trees, from rough oak or smooth-rinded beech. In such an hour the soul will seem to come close to the very

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

outmost gates of being; so close, it feels their touch—shrinking back from the chill prison of mortality. Hope, love, death, are not; only a burning to be free, so the soul might release herself from mortal sense. The solemn trees stand round—calm, immutable, as for ages they have stood, types of the inexorable. What are we to them, with all our perishing human love and hate? born to die, while they grow on for ever, calmly growing to decay, self-involved in a grand, profound indifference!

Slow, slow, the red-gold sunset illumines each leaf-crowned head, till the sullen passive strength of the great trees seems to pass into a smile; until, looking upward through green ranks of branch and leaf, there shines at last a little space of tenderest blue—above, immeasurably far.

V

A White Earwig



*Even these, the humble little ones of the earth,
though they suffer, yet are they also holden in
the Hand of God.*

A White Earwig

THE rain hardly ever ceased during all July and August. The corn was still quite green, the fields were marshes, and the roads were mud, and the garden borders sodden with wet. When sometimes the clouds would break for a little space and the sun shot down a bright glance upon the trees, the wet leaves trembled in the breeze and shook with diamonds. It was a dismal afternoon, the sky black and lowering, the road to the village deep in mud. Under a line of beech along the first part of the road it should have been less wet and muddy, but that day, and for days before, nothing was dry. Dryness had become an unknown word.

Along a slippery, narrow cart-rut something very small and quite white—a little white shape—glided slowly, hesitatingly, at our feet. The brown wet mud enwalled the little thing on either side. It was so very small that one marvels how any should

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

have observed or stooped down to scrutinise more closely. Living things sometimes seem to project a kind of semblance to the mind through the eye that sees them from far off; so that although the exact form may scarcely by reason of its distance or smallness be quite clearly seen, the mind decides for itself in a flash what manner of being the creature is. Thus, although no feature of the slender minuteness in our path might be discerned at once, we knew at once it was an earwig. A small, though full-grown, milk-white earwig. Why was it *white*? I bent down to look more closely. It was like a delicate ivory carving: milk-white, from the eyes to the daintily forked tail. The great, beautiful, laced wings were somehow rumpled about the shoulders. The creature looked like a bride gathering up her veil in haste. For a minute I watched the poor little white figure feebly making her way along the muddy cart-wheel rut. Some definite end she had in view; some inner, well-defined purpose impelled her to quit the safe shelter of her dark crevice in the rugged bark of an oak-tree,—leagues away, as distance counts in such a microscopic world,—and brave the dangers of that rain-soaked track. Wherever the goal of her wandering, the little milk-white

A White Earwig

bride was never to attain it; for a blow from one of my companions came suddenly down upon her. I saw it coming, sudden though the action was,—and yet, not having presence of mind at the moment, I was silent. So in the night, and the next day, and the next, the vision of the little crushed white life haunted one of us. Not, indeed, the one who did it, but the one who had failed to avert the blow; had given consent, as it were, by silence. And so the little, breathing, perchance God-guided—living creature became a nothing, a mere white smudge in the mire. I need feel no shame for my remorse, or for the momentary weakness. And after all, size is only relative. The injustice is the same; whether it be the shooting for sport of elephants and big harmless beasts in the wilds of India or Africa, or the slaying of a tiny, white earwig-elf. Though for such “mord”—as, anciently, murder was written—there may be perhaps acquit. For acquittance may rest in the feeling too common with us all, the feeling of unconquerable antipathy. That strange, natural antipathy to creeping things that is born with us. And allied with it is the impulse to destroy that which the soul abhors. No question of “Live and let live”; the impulse is

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

for Death. So, for all her garb of innocence she wore, the little creeping thing must die.

And so, also, it happened to a ladybird, of uncommon size and depth of colour, swept in by the wind through the window on to the floor of a railway carriage, in which I was travelling once, years ago. Ladybirds bring good luck, and they save many a rose-bush from the blight of green-fly. For a minute I gazed with joy on the motley scarlet globe at my feet. Then some one got up from his seat and stepped across from right the other side of the compartment—to admire also—as I quite believed. Ah, no! The thought of his heart was death. And a heavy boot was at once set sternly down on that painted scrap of insect beneficence. After all these years, I still seem distinctly to hear the *crunch*! Was it merely a rude man's natural instinct to kill, or was it the in-born aversion to things that creep, even though so innocent and so handsome? Its sole crime,—being made with six legs; and yet they were so well concealed underneath deep eaves of such a gaily jettied buckler! Certain it is, whosoever may in the end deal the death-blow, there is a day of destiny for each created thing—for the small and for the great.

A White Earwig

For the small white creature or the scarlet beetle; for both, the sun of their little day had set. The dial had touched the hour—and they were not. To the rose in the bloom of her beauty, on a day comes a whisper among the leaves, in the stillness of noon; and a rose-leaf drops down to the earth. Her day is done. For man in his strength the unseen shadow waits by the wayside. Another step, and he is gathered into gloom.

Is it not an uncomfortable, almost a sorrowful thought, to feel the utter estrangement that exists between ourselves and the infinitely little who surround us on every side? Not tiresome or hurtful things like the midge or the sleepy house-fly: I am thinking of others that are entirely innocent of harm, and in their utter helplessness are often brushed aside or killed because they happen to be in our way, and never a thought or regret is felt for the destroying of structures of such marvellous minuteness, such exquisite delicacy.

Years ago, I remember one summer day I was busy writing near a window; the bright sunlight flooded the table and portfolio where I was at work. Suddenly I became aware of the presence of the strangest little party of extraordinarily tiny

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

so-called *mites*. They slid in and out from underneath the writing-paper, and played about in giddy rounds. Their heads were abnormally large and round and flat;—so big as half a pin's head—about the size of a baby fairy's dessert-plate! (the large size in proportion to the body of an insect's head is remarked to be often a sign of good nature, while a small one indicates the reverse).—So these little beings of the great heads gave one an impression of the most good-natured in all creation! In and out and about they ran and played. They were quite harmless, and not very ugly for the sort of thing. Every one would have been ruthlessly destroyed if caught. When I shook the paper they ceased their play, raced off and disappeared. One, however, lay low: it remained quite still. Hard to make this quiet one the victim! but so it was. A moment's pause for pity, and its little treasure, Life, had been spared. Alas, too late! The deed was done. (Can anything on God's earth ever be undone?)

Now and then afterwards, I confess, I thought of that tiny round-head: of a merry life, though small, so suddenly put an end to. And it may have cost me the ghost of a sigh! Did the thought teach pitifulness? It might be so. Yet

A White Earwig

admonitions often have to knock hard before we listen.

Once on a time, one damp dark winter morning, there appeared waiting at my window as I opened it, a certain misshapen, evil-looking, sad-coloured creeping thing. By the instant movement of his hundred legs I divined his clear intention of crossing over the wet window-sill and entering the house. The intention was frustrated: and the centipede no more seen. Since an English centipede, I believe, has never been known to bite, it is but its loathsome appearance that weighs so heavily against it, and for which its life must pay forfeit.

If, as has been said, beauty is God's charity, it is sad to reflect how innumera-
bly the precious gift is denied; and how, when at the outset denied, this especial jewel, dearer, and of greater moment it may be to the possessor than all else beside, is from generation to generation after, for all time withheld. . . . The sad-coloured, creeping, ill-favoured creature, scorned and viewed with horror, was forbid, and entered not my house. It was seen no more. Yet did something—more ugly and far larger—come silently in that morning. Grief, unbidden, came and sat down with us in the house, and stayed for many a long day after.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Some, I suppose, might think they discerned a meaning in the matter. They would say—"It *had* to be one or the other; One or the Other had to enter. Fate willed the Other. An unwelcome ugliness, displeasing, or even, it may be, repulsive, enters your life. Bear with it, for the millionth chance that its presence fills the place of some unknown and far worse evil. There has to be One or the Other. Make your own choice; but in the end, know that Fate alone wills which it is to be. The thing we call Fate, perfect and beautiful according to whose ordinations all beings advance to their beatitude"—or otherwise. I believe not much in Fate. Yet, at the back of my mind, I know that still there lies concealed a vague regret, and I feel that I selfishly regret the ending of that centipede!—Did ever creature so gruesomely made arouse a sentiment as gentle?

Returning again for a moment to the day of small things, of Nature's delicate masterpieces. We know almost nothing about them in any way, and it is better not to try to humour them when we come across them, or help them in their struggle to get on in life. We sometimes make mistakes. . . .

In our little flower-border, close against a south window, grew one of those coarse,

A White Earwig

dull, lilac poppies that no one much likes. It was tall and lusty ; had grown up in the strongest, rudest health with blue-green leaves, and any number of big, bouncing seed-balls, vigorously ripening under the July sun ; for the flowering of it was over. Just behind this lilac poppy, from an invisible chink in the stone window-sill, quivering at the breath of every lightest zephyr that stole round the corner of the house, dwelt the poppy's little daughter. Such a poor little, frail, yellow, dried-up thing ! only about five inches high. She had had a hard struggle all her life merely to exist. Yet real lilac poppies, minute, yet true to type, had been flowered on that tiny little stem, in colour and form quite like the old poppy, only smaller in size, scarcely so large as a shilling-piece. I had watched the blooming of three little poppies within two weeks' time. They differed from the parent flowers in one way, for their pale fragile petals seldom lasted through the day, but feebly fluttered down till each small seed-vessel in turn stood bare. There were but two topmost green leaves showing even the faintest tinge of green. The few remaining lower down had long since faded into yellow, like the slender straw which was the stalk. Then, one bright summer morning,

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

the Great Poppy came to a sudden end. It was Saturday ; and the old plant with all its ripe, stiff rounds of seed with the bloom on them was pulled up and thrown into the wheelbarrow and carried away with dead roses, weeds, and seeding snapdragons. The airy shadows of blue-green leaves that gave shelter all through those burning months of June and July no longer helped to cool the air around the south window. Leaves and shadow, both were gone. And from that day a change came over the little Poppy in the stone. The pure, faint green, faded quite from her two best leaves ; strange shivers trembled through the dry stalk whenever the hot south blew. The mothering poppy's shadow had failed when the need was sorest. Still, once more, yet another little blossom took heart and spread abroad some sad, pale lilac. And I thought to myself, "shade and moisture are badly wanted." So a fine pebble was picked up from the gravel walk and placed near the poppy's root,—if root might be,—down there within the stone window-sill. And a cupful of cold water was poured over it ; awkwardly enough, indeed, for the stream scattered that poor last floweret. "To-morrow," I said, "you will be all right, you dear little poppy !" But neither to-morrow nor next

A White Earwig

day, nor ever again did it come all right. Days passed, and hour by hour the leaves lost all their green. Thinner and older grew the yellowing stock. And soon the small thing that had seemed far too small for great death to heed—was dead. It had been better let alone even by the wisest while it yet strove to live.

The sun shone gloriously in at the south window, and the muslin curtain was drawn to keep him out. And early in the morning the women had been about their work, and had cleared away a poor, dry, meagre shred—all that remained of an existence self-contained and patient, albeit wondrously insignificant. And they scrubbed and cleaned and whitened the stone window-sill, until no one ever could have believed anything ever had flowered there. Even the three little seed-cases—so long, so painfully upborne against the day of ripening—fell and perished likewise.

Judge not too scornfully, wise reader, if even amid the stress and wear of life, one may sometimes love to stoop down,

“To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower.”

VI

An (Almost) Ideal City



*Labour not to be rich : cease from thine own
wisdom.*

VI

An (Almost) Ideal City

BESIDE the Mediterranean Sea close under the Maritime Alps, on a sandy ridge, the town is built. The slope below it is rich with olive and pine wood, and with a luxuriant undergrowth of aromatic cistus, wild juniper and myrtle. From the sandy cliff on the left, you look down upon the bay with its blue waters and bright circling shore, and on the other side, across the valley to a wide range of beautiful hills clothed from their very summit downwards with the sea-pines of that country, or with intermingling masses of silvery grey olive, which lower down meet the fertile plain. There is also amid the olives many a little white-walled city rising above the trees and shining white in the dazzling sunlight. Each little town has its high cupola or church tower, which dominates the grey roofs, and is clearly seen from far off in the distance.

If at mid-day you follow the dusty high-road, or take your way by pleasantly shaded

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

mule-paths up to the entering in of one of these hillside woodland towns, you will walk through dim and narrow streets, where sleepy faces look down from the high upper windows as you pass. And few are the sounds will meet your ear except the murmur of running waters and splash of fountains, or the hum of voices, where knots of women gather with their distaffs and iron coffee-roasters to gossip around their neighbours' doors—till you come to the little market-place. There old men sit on stone benches under the great town plane-tree. There they meet, day after day, smoking their pipes and grumbling out old tales of long ago, while at their feet lie stretched their old dogs, lazily sleeping in the sun. There is an abiding sense of sleep over all the place; for the younger men are away at work with their donkeys, in the fields or among the olives, and the children are busy over their books at school; and there is nothing to see, nothing to hear, and nothing to do, in the little hill town.

Quite close to the villa where I live, near the borders of its garden-land, are situated other cities of a character altogether different. In these you see from afar, no gleaming of white house-walls, as in those on the distant hillsides; in the streets shines no ray of sunlight, for the so-called "streets"



IN PRIDE. "POWDERED WITH STARS"

An (Almost) Ideal City

are only dark covered ways. And on the gloom within, as well as upon the ramparts, silence, night and day, forever reigns unbroken and profound. Yet if you approach the outskirts of one of these cities you will find that the streets are full to overflowing of busy life, and the silent, tumultuous, excitement of a vast population all absorbed in the same occupation, the same work of some apparently immense interest which admits of no repose, no pause for idle talk. From the largest and most important of these sunless towns, there have at intervals gone forth colonies which now within a certain radius form a long line of villages and smaller cities. The mother town is built upon a rocky eminence facing south, and overlooking an arid, stony plain, sheltered at the back by the all-prevailing olive groves. The style of architecture is, to our eyes, both strange and uncouth. The buildings—so far as we understand them—almost shapeless, and guiltless of any kind of architecture or regular design. Yet that some kind of design does certainly exist can scarcely be doubted, could we but give time and patience for more careful and minute investigation and study of the whole plan with all its details. The general appearance of the buildings, it must, however, be confessed, is simply an

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

irregular mass of rounded or broken outline, built of clay and granite rudely cemented together. Windows there are none; only low, arched openings leading into long, intricate and night-black passages. One thing I have observed with wonder, namely, whereas great public works appear always to be in progress, there is no Master Builder, nor have I ever seen or known of the presence of any Clerk of the Works. Yet amongst the many hundreds of labourers there is never any sign of confusion, nor of the least misunderstanding.

The inhabitants of this City are in stature a very little people. Yet are they great, by reason of the greatness of their moral qualities. Their chiefest characteristics, and those for which they are noted among the nations, are four: Courage, Patriotism, unwearying Perseverance, united to an almost superhuman Endurance.

They are also a very ancient race. The existence of this strange nation dates further back than so-called prehistoric ages. And it is the people to whom in Holy Scripture the Wise King points, as an example to his fellow-men of self-forgetting diligence.

From other great towns this one which we are now considering differs much, for amongst ten thousands of citizens there is

An (Almost) Ideal City

not found one idle or one disreputable character. The citizens in the aggregate are like a family, every member of which is animated by the same feeling, *i.e.* an intense care and anxiety for the common good. Should this lead them—as no doubt at times it may—to acts of individual cruelty and hardness, the universal patriotism burning within the breast of each is more continuously displayed in devotion and self-sacrifice. I cannot deny, however, that if one of the community fall ill, or if he happen to suffer from wounds inflicted by an enemy, or is maimed in any manner, he must hope for no shadow of tenderness from his brethren who are whole. They drag him away through the town, and he is mercilessly slain as a useless member of the community, and his body cast outside the walls.

Neither does the city show respect for the Dead.

When a citizen dies, whether he were one of the most heroic, or the best or the strongest and most energetic amongst them, there is no fuss made; the corpse is not suffered to cumber the place for a single moment. It is either carried aside and flung down without the walls, or is at once built up into their substance. Surely these few defects—this

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

cold stony-heartedness — are mere trifles compared with a thousand higher qualities!

Long ere sunrise the whole city is astir. There are no shops to open nor fires to light, so the populace rise and pour forth immediately without the waste of a moment of time, and hasten to their work on the boulevards or in the Public Nurseries amongst the young. And as the sun mounts higher and the day grows hotter, so does the untiring energy of the people grow with the hours of the day. Faster and faster they run, and more and more hurried are the greetings between friend and friend by the way. Sometimes in their hot haste they will not hesitate to throw themselves down from the rock where the town is built, if that may appear to be the shortest road to the stony plain beyond, where they collect their granite blocks and logs of wood for building. Laden with huge burdens—often some forty times their own size—they return and toil up the face of the rock, undismayed by fatigue or by the great weight they carry, or by stumbling and sliding backward over and over again. Inspired by this ardent spirit of courage under difficulties, this people never fail at the last to conquer and achieve their end. During the long hours of the longest summer day, they have never been seen to slack work for one

An (Almost) Ideal City

instant, nor stop for food or rest. Only at sundown do they cease from labour, and retire within the houses to sleep. But should the city walls on a sudden be attacked by an enemy, or destroyed, perhaps, in the dead of night—as not seldom happens in a country where storms of rain and hail do so often rage—I have known the devoted citizens with one consent forego their night's repose, and guided—who knows how?—issue forth into the darkness, without lamp or torch to light them, to fight and conquer the foe, or labour at repairing the breaches. And their zeal is such, that before morning light their cherished towers and bulwarks have been often known to be almost entirely rebuilt. And not even then will they rest. As though fired by a fresh ambition, the works go on with unabated vigour, and new lines of buildings are added to the old, and the old increased in size and height. For this people are possessed by the desire to build—by a passionate love of architecture—as well as by an intense devotion to their children. And so these two master passions blend together as one; for the whole city is built up more especially for the sake of the rising generation. It is for the young that these State Nurseries are built, these great granaries stored with a wealth of ripened grain, gathered in autumn

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and brought home with such infinite care and labour. Too often are the granaries dispersed by accidents, or broken into and their treasure stolen by some marauding beast or bird ; for certain creatures exist that are too idle to labour or store for themselves, and who live by the harvests that others gathered.

With devoted care the young are nurtured, and they are each and all brought up to a single trade—the trade of builders and road-makers—the builders of their homes, and the engineers of their city streets and roads. It must not be forgotten that an exception to this rule of universal trade is made in favour of the military. I never saw a soldier doing mason's work nor watching the cradles of the children. And thus, since all must work at one art and for one great object, *i.e.* the public good—there is no room for rivalry.

Thus trades-unions are unheard of ; they do not exist. As a rule, the people are a people who follow Peace. Amongst the many virtues they display, one, alas ! is wanting. I find here no sign of love for the Beautiful. There is none whatever, I fear, either in their lives or in their architecture. All that is done is done for Use ; and in that sense doubtless their work lacks not one best quality, that is, the beauty of fitness. But in vain shall one turn to look for some little

An (Almost) Ideal City

attempt at ornament whereon to rest the eye. Everything is prosaically bald, and plain and solid, for they are a race of stern utilitarians, and they live up to the very letter of their creed. And is this perchance a reason why Joy finds here no place? The gaiety of youth is banished. It is useless. Life here is all work and no play. I never heard one of this people laugh; I never saw them smile. There are no games. The joy of Sport exists not in this grave, busy city. Sometimes it happens that a couple of citizens will engage in wrestling; but there are no lookers-on, no one takes the least interest. It is all Labour, never-ending Labour, from dawn to dark. Yet I believe this unceasing exertion is their heart-felt, as in truth it is their sole, delight.

Little mention has as yet been made of the Army. They are a small body compared with the rest of the population. But the soldiers are as brave as lions. Strange enough, they also differ physically from the rest, inasmuch as a soldier's head is always a very remarkably big one. One day I watched a company of these big-headed warriors go forth to war, formed in column. This is what happened. A swollen river crossed the road. The column instantly dashed into the water, and—heedless of their broken ranks and of a

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

hundred comrades carried away by the stream and drowned — all of them that were left scrambled through the water, hurrying on to the encounter on the other side ; and I could not perceive that they were worsted. Often I have seen a soldier seize with his big jaws the immense head of a soldier enemy, dragging him up and down and never letting go, not even when Death comes to part the combatants. Fear or pain are things they know not, or else such matters are utterly ignored in this almost ideal City of Formica.

Books have been written and much has been observed, and much is well known to naturalists of the manners of this remarkable people and their tribes ; yet as much, at least, is still undiscovered of their ways of life, of their policy, of the meaning of many of their customs. The vulgar idea is that a thing called Instinct accounts for all. An easy method this of evading a difficulty. Dictionaries also find it easy to interpret instinct as "that which urges or impels." But does this elucidate ? I regret to acknowledge that an ancestor of my own, the famous Dr. Bentley, has pronounced instinct to be "a natural impulse to certain actions which the animal performs without deliberation, without having any end in view, and frequently without knowing what it does."

An (Almost) Ideal City

Are the Yellow Ants unaware of any end whatsoever when they war against the Black Ants, take prisoners, and make them do all the work? Has the "Parasol Ant" no meaning in his mind when he cuts pieces of green leaves and holds them over his head as a protection from the burning sun? With all due respect for Dr. Bentley, I should call this kind of instinct common-sense. Is there no cunning in the White Ant, when he eats out the whole *inside* wood of some great house-beam, leaving it standing a mere hollow sham, while he feeds in safe hiding within? or the Honey Ants, who make of themselves honey-pots for the community to store? And is it in the blindness of "mere instinct" that Ants keep Cows (green Aphides) in their chambers and milk them, as it were; or that they never are known to molest the little slippery silvery fish-like creatures who inhabit the dark labyrinths of ant-hills and keep them clean? Scientific records contain numberless true tales such as these. Personally, I myself have only watched the habits of the Yellow Ants (of France), in capturing their black slaves and forcing them to work—chiefly as trusted nurses for their young, so far as I can recollect—these, and the Riviera Harvesting Ants. There have been, however, not a few keen observers in all countries

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

vigilant over the strange cities of a people "not strong, yet they prepare their meat in summer," whose very name, as we learn, means either never idle, or that they are furnished, provided, or that they received their name from their provident habits.

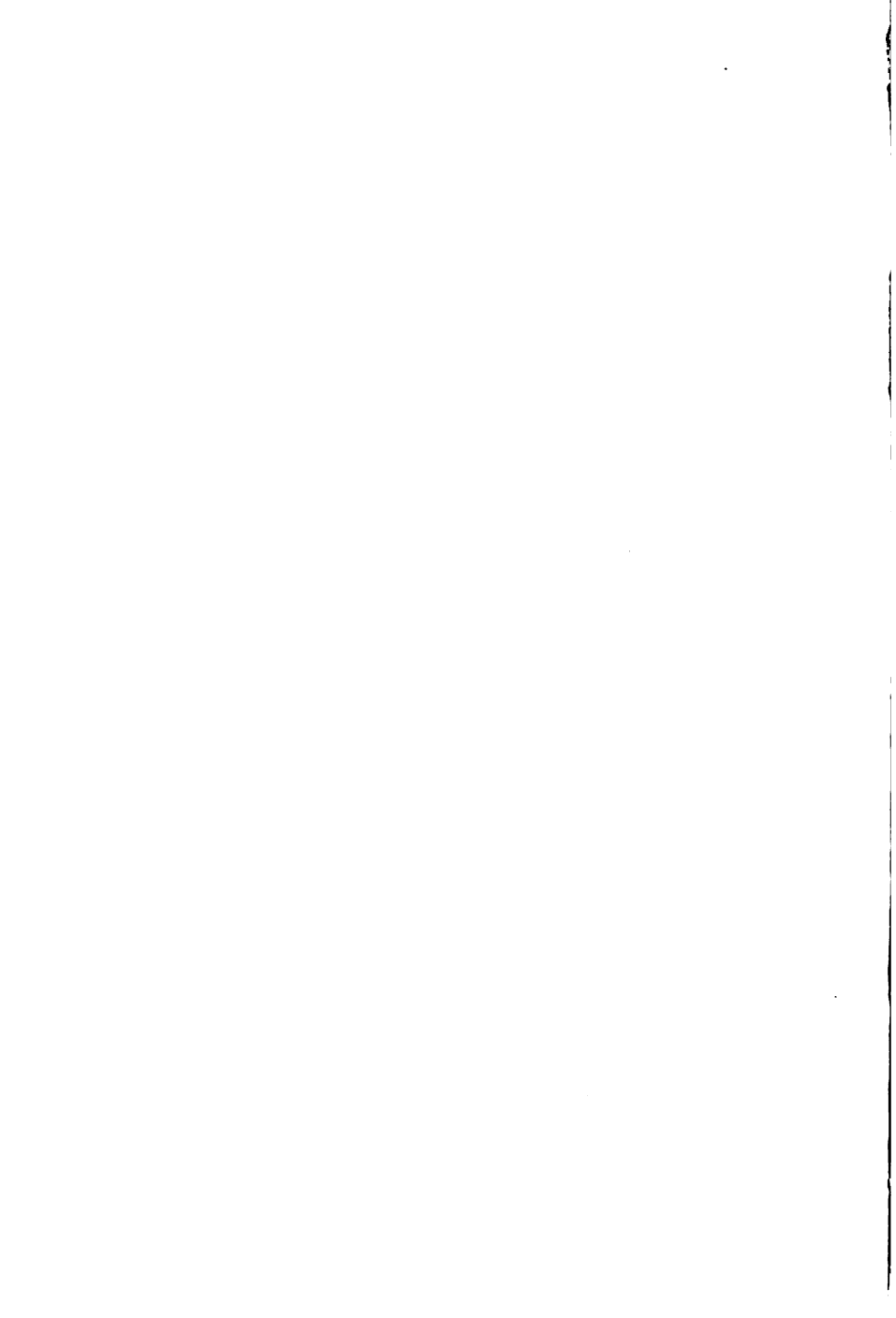
Sometimes, as in the small kitchen of a country cottage I knew, the meaning of their ways is difficult to conjecture. Behind the wainscot of the kitchen window lived a colony of innumerable Black Ants. One day the cook found their continued presence unbearable, and a can of boiling water was poured over and into the place where the ants' nest was supposed to be, and soon numbers of dead ants lay upon the wooden window-sill. Presently a large body of survivors, having recovered from their panic, appeared upon the scene, and instantly set to work, and without more ado they carried off every one of their dead into some dark corner behind the shutter. Why did they do it? Not to supply their larder, for ants are not supposed to feed on one another. Was it, then, simply from a sense of decency—a desire to bury their dead out of their sight? In England ants are not much esteemed. It is different in eastern lands.

The Hindus in Rajputana are said to scatter rice and sugar at the entrance to ants'

An (Almost) Ideal City

nesses, either to propitiate their goodwill or from sentiments of fear for their power or energy, or from admiration of the forethought and sense of duty to the community displayed by them.

A custom said to prevail in Arabia is a tribute to the ant. An ant is placed in the hand of a new-born child, in order that its virtues may pass into and possess the child.



VII

Of a Little Old House in Banffshire



*It is not well to go forth abroad on Midsummer's
Eve. On such an eve they also walk. Neither
should one look from the windows of the house.*

VII

Of a Little Old House in Banffshire

*From a letter written by Miss Maggie Broome to
a friend. December 13, 1880.*

YOU ask me to write and tell you exactly how it all was—I mean about what happened at Aunt Rachel's house in Scotland where I stayed one summer. So you shall hear the whole thing: though, after all, it wasn't very much. And yet I never could put down in words how really frightful it seemed at the time. Poor Aunt Rachel was alive and well then; and as you know, I was staying with her at her little old turreted house in Banffshire. I liked being there, for I did pretty much what I liked all day long. Aunt kept her house in the most delightful comfort: she was considered amongst her friends quite a notable house-keeper. Her sole amusement was the mending and tidying up of the house-linen. The

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

hours and days she spent in that occupation and folding up and putting past that house-linen! She had absolutely nothing else in the world to do however. Sewing was her only joy. I, being young and light-footed, I could never for my part understand the pleasure nor the use of spending hours of delicious sunshine in the house, engaged in the dull business of hemming and marking and mending, when one might be so happy roaming the heather and the woods or fishing in the burn, or wandering by the sea, enjoying the air of Scotland which is like no other air. I am afraid I never once thought of staying at home with Aunt to help her, or to sit down and have a chat with her, and try to amuse her a little, not for any least little bit of a fine summer's day; and when I think of that, I feel sorry now. I disliked the very sight of all that white linen that used to be brought down by her maid to the drawing-room for my Aunt to see to; I was always so afraid of being invited to hem something. And what happened afterwards in that very room, did not make me love the sort of thing any better. We very seldom had any visitors calling, in those days; for the station was miles away, and neighbours were few and far between; and those lovely motors! had not yet become common quite

A Little Old House

so far North. So my Aunt's work-basket and things remained in the room all day and all night except Sundays; and the sheets and tablecloths were often left all night heaped up on the floor beside her chair. (Very untidy, I thought.) I must try and describe the drawing-room. It was rather long and narrow, with the ceiling rather low, and two narrow deep-set windows were at the end opposite the door. Aunt's chair and little round work-table usually stood about the centre of the room, near the fireplace. There were a few pictures on the walls, of course; chiefly prints of dull old ancestry, most of them ministers in black gowns and bands, in dull old frames. We did not have any flowers as a rule there or anywhere else in the house. I think my Aunt disliked flowers; at least, if one happened to bring in a bunch of wild-roses or anything, she always said they "smelt too strong." There were no drawing-room ornaments: only three black things on the chimney-piece, which she once told me were very valuable; which they might be, but nobody could call them pretty! and only one arm-chair and a high hard sofa and a few good-books that nobody read set out on a table, and then the work-basket and the linen; always there for ever and ever. So

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

now please picture to yourself Aunt Rachel's drawing-room. The two windows looked out rather drearily across some wide hilly fields where black-faced Highland sheep wandered about, and a little chattering burn divided the fields from the heather; and two tall sycamores stood together before the door, in front of the house. They are curious trees, Scotch Sycamores! These two seemed to watch the house all day, and the wind made uncouth noises through the branches. Sometimes we could hear the sound of the sea, if the wind set right for it. There was no flower garden at all; only a kail-yard, with a brier-bush or two, and plenty of strawberries to make up for no flowers.

One evening just before supper-time, about eight o'clock, I had to go and fetch my Aunt's spectacles, which she fancied she had left in the drawing-room. It was Midsummer's Eve, and it was the hour when in Scotland the light begins to look remote, though still quite clear. The spectacles were nowhere to be seen; not on the chimney-piece nor the table; but the work and things were all right. And there was, of course, plenty of my "*bête noire*"—the house-linen—near Aunt's chair; and a great white sheet—one of the new pair she had that morning brought down to hem—lay an untidy mass

A Little Old House

on the carpet. I forgot Aunt was waiting for her glasses, and went up to the window (they were both open) just to see if it were a squirrel whose furry brush I thought I saw, running up one of the sycamores—and to listen for a moment to the pipes away down in the village, playing “The Flowers of the Forest,” or some old tune like that. At the window I believe I may have stayed looking out and listening and dreaming about things, perhaps a little longer than I ought. The evening was so dry and beautiful, with the weird loveliness of those Scotch summer evenings, when the belated sunset touches and illumines all things with a faint red rose-light; giving such an indescribable sense of far-away-ness to the highest branches of the trees and leaving all else intensely cold-looking. The hour which ought to be twilight, but in the North is not that at all, when the grass and the stones and such-like stand out clear, and yet there are no shadows. That hour of the evening has always had a kind of fascination for me. I feel as if something unearthly might happen at any moment; that one might see anything uncanny glide by, or moving about in earth or air, more especially on Midsummer Eve like that was. The eve when fairies and things are out and about everywhere:

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and if you happen to be walking along the road by a high wall, a black goat or anything unpleasant may jump down on your shoulders and terrify you out of your life !

The squirrel had scrambled down the stem of the biggest sycamore, and with little leaps and skips was clearing the space between that and the other tree. The music still went and came on the breeze from the village below, and sounded very sweet, grieving and *girling* as the bagpipes do. The tune had changed to my favourite "Robin Adair"; and I forgot myself till, suddenly, I bethought me of my errand to hunt for Aunt's spectacles; and, turning from the window, hastened to leave the room and go down and tell her they were nowhere. You know the door was at the other end of the room, opposite the windows. The little round work-table and the heap of white house-linen were in the middle of the carpet between door and windows, and in order to get to the door I must pass close by the heap. I had only made two steps towards the door when something seemed to strike me as rather odd about the linen; I fancied it almost seemed to move—to begin to crawl. "Nothing but a trick of the gloaming light," thought I. But it is not quite nice if only to *fancy*

A Little Old House

you see anything inanimate crawl like that, whether it does really crawl or not. So I resolutely turned my head the other way and tried to get past and out at the door as quick as I could. I looked back—something constrained me to look back. . . . The linen sheet heaved! As I stared at it, it seemed to creep along the carpet towards me. . . . My feet stuck as though glued to the floor, while the thing crept and crept on and on, and, to my horror, at last got between the door and me. With most frightful contortions—for certain I beheld the sheet move! with a kind of horrid movement,—while I stood like a statue unable to stir. And the huddled, formless whiteness shuddered and swayed and crawled and uplifted itself nearer and nearer till it *touched* me. . . . I tried to scream, but my voice was dumb. And round and round me it swirled and twisted and choked me with its dreadful folds, folding round my head and face, impalpable, as it were, like thick mist—cold and silent and featureless. Then it absolutely drew me, helpless as I was, across the room and right up under one of the windows. Twisted and drawn with deadly force it was impossible to escape. I felt I *must* soon be pulled out through the open window, narrow as it was. Tighter and harder every moment grasped, I knew I must

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

be killed! And then—and then, I think at last a cry burst from me, and I sank down senseless while the awful whiteness, as they told me after, uncurled, unwound, and flowed away out through the open window.

Aunt Rachel must have heard the cry, for she hurried up into the drawing-room. And as my senses came slowly back, I could hear her scolding Helen and Hephzibah, who had rushed up to see what was the matter, for “leaving the windows open so late and the mist lying all about the fields white as a shroud! What for were ye so careless?” And my Aunt began to be very Scotch, as she always did when excited. She put me to bed at once and gave me something hot, for I was *icy* cold.

Next day I was quite myself again; there were whisperings in the house about the new house-linen that had been mysteriously lost in some odd way or other. But nothing was said to me on the subject. Aunt was very silent, never breathed a word of it to anybody. Poor dear Aunt Rachel! She herself seemed lost, as it were, for a day or two. She never touched her usual needlework, the joy of her heart. And once when I tried the drawing-room door, I found it was locked. I never entered it again and did

A Little Old House

not want to. It gives me the horrors even to think of it.

Then they sent for me home to England ; and the prospect of a change was most agreeable. The day came for my departure. Aunt stood at the door waving good-bye, and the old squirrel was scuttling up the sycamore as the fly drove off with me and my boxes, and a turn in the road soon hid the turreted house. And that is the last I ever saw of Aunt Rachel or the squirrel either, for you know she died just a year after, and left me the black ornaments and an ancestor or two from the drawing-room, and the place was sold. I often think over the happenings in that old house, and 'oh ! how I pity whoever has to repose in the sheets Aunt Rachel hemmed ! And oh ! I hope I shall never again visit in a house where people mend the linen and leave it all in a heap on the drawing-room carpet. I feel a cold shiver even now when I think of it. . . . You'll never get half through this long history. But you wanted to know about it, so now you have it. I hope the account won't make you nervous ! Scotland is and always was the land of romance. Quite different to England, you know : that's what is so nice about Scotland.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Strange, is it not? that not until some time after my Aunt's death did I remember what had once occurred when I was a child, living with my mother in a street of the old town at Dresden. It came back to my mind one day. This was it:—One day I ran into the room where my mother's maid was folding and sorting out the house-linen on a large table. Somehow I managed to upset off the table a pile of two or three pairs of sheets or tablecloths. "Oh, Fräulein!" she cried out, turning quite white, "Quick, quick! Gather them up at once. If they lie on the floor like that, they'll turn to winding-sheets!" I did not very well understand at that time what "winding-sheets" meant. But I obediently picked up the linen as I was told, and thought no more about it. But what a fright the German maid had when the things were upset! . . . and how I laughed!

It is an uncomfortable little superstition, and I don't believe in it at all. Besides, at Banff the linen had been often and often lying on the floor before that midsummer eve, and nothing happened. Still it is odd (you knew it, I think?) that Aunt Rachel should have died on Midsummer's Eve, just twelve months after that terror I had in the old house.



IN DOUBT

A Little Old House

This is the longest letter I ever wrote in my life! and you ought to be grateful. Remember it is all *quite private*: just between you and me, you know. I shouldn't care for people to say I was clutched by a Ghost!

VIII

On the Bridge at Lucerne



*O Spirit land,
Thou land of dreams ——
A world thou art of mysterious
gleams
· · · · · ·
A world of the dead in the hues
of life.*

VIII

On the Bridge at Lucerne

AFTER the rain and thunder ceased, the sun shone out hot and bright, the clouds cleared off the mountains, and there remained time for an afternoon stroll before dinner. Leaving our hotel on the noisy quay, where all day long steamers are bustling in from different parts of the lake, or puffing and blowing, getting up steam to take out gay crowds of tourists ready for the daily pleasure excursions—where idle people walk up and down from morning till night, smoking and chatting under the shady chestnut trees; and omnibuses rattle along to and from the railway station,—we pass on through old streets and market-places, to the old wooden bridge crossing the river, joining one quarter of the town to the other. Here all is so quiet that you step at once, as it were, upon a narrow shred of an older world, left clinging to the skirts of our matter-of-fact To-day. The bridge is roofed over—the usual fashion in Switzerland—to shelter from the snow.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

On the left, at the entrance to the bridge stands the corn-mill with its heavy, out-of-date machinery and ponderous wheel, which the deep, rapid river is still thought good enough to turn, as it has done for the last hundred years and more. In the wide doorway of the mill lie great sacks of flour; close by—in the shade—waits the miller's handsome white Flemish pack-horse, whisking away the flies with his long tail, while two or three dusty millers' boys lazily lean with their arms across his broad back, reminding one of a cabinet picture by Wouvermans. Turning their throats of burnished purple in the sun—clear-cut—against the black shadow of the entrance to the bridge, strut half a score or so of pigeons, white, red and black, picking up the grain scattered about the door. And now we seem to come within the precincts of some fantastic dream. No one who had not seen it could imagine so strange a bridge as this is! Along its whole length, in the dimness between the brown rafters of the roof, are fixed pictures that years have blackened and time has faded. Yet if you look up long and steadily into them, they will begin to grow clearer and more distinct; so that although the explanatory legends in old German, written under each picture, are now almost unreadable,

On the Bridge at Lucerne

their ghastly meaning becomes plain enough. The pictures are done by many hands, but in each the grim subject, Death, is one and the same.

Death, as he comes to all ranks and conditions of men,—Death in his ghastliest form, in the form of a skeleton. At the far end is the Garden of Eden, and our first parents in their misery, flame-driven by the stern angel from the gates. Outside those happy gates, Death, with a mocking smile, is ready to receive them. Death starts up from the pathway by the road before the plumed Warrior in his pride going forth to battle, and, seizing the bridle of his terrified charger, turns him right the other way. In the midst of his riches, surrounded by servants and bales of merchandise, Death surprises the Merchant Prince, in all his luxury and feasting. Deaf to the man's prayers for some brief respite, a bony hand is held out with the written summons, from which there is no appeal, citing him to appear before the Great Judge. In his well-trimmed garden among roses and gay flower-borders, the stricken Gardener is met by Death, who comes with a pruning-hook in his hand. He steps between the bridegroom and his blooming bride as they return from church. He darts his deadly arrow straight at the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

heart of the young girl singing over her needlework, sitting beside her sister at the cottage door. Death rocks the cradle of the clockmaker's babe, heedless of the father's grief, who points imploringly to the Clock, the hands of which have scarce passed the first hour of the day. Every scene, with one exception only, makes Death unwelcome—the never-welcome guest—ugly and hateful. In this one picture alone is he lovely. There is a dying saint stretched upon his bed. Through the open window you see grey evening fall softly upon the towers and fields and trees of earth. On a stool near the couch lies the book of the old man's life closed—it is written out to the last page. Wide open beside it the Book of Holy Scriptures, which were his Guide in life and his comfort to the end. Apart, with hushed voices, stand a little group of friends watching. With calm, steadfast eye the saint looks up into the face of Death, who, robed in white, stoops down to kiss him, embracing him with gentlest tenderness. The holy peace of this beautiful scene, although painted in the same hard, old-German manner as the rest, would almost seem to heal the cold, intense horror of the others. Well may one guess and feel the intention of those townsmen of old, who thus storied

On the Bridge at Lucerne

their bridge across the river,—the bridge across which all the town must daily pass,—with scenes of man and his great Enemy. In those days schools were so few, and painted pictures had to be the books where the people learned the best of their lessons. At Lucerne, when in the early morning hours going forth to their work or returning home in the evening, when people heard the sound of the flowing stream under the boards where their feet went, and saw the shadowy Deaths overhead, they were taught to remember the River of Time, the River that divides Time and Eternity, and that dark, painful, Bridge which, soon or late, all must tread. Half-way across, on one side, is built a little chapel dedicated to the patron saint of rivers, where a dim little lamp burns day and night before the small altar-stone. Wooden benches there are also, all along the sides of the bridge, whereon weary ones may rest. And here, this hot June day, I and my friend sat for nearly a whole hour; dreamily listening to the rush of never-resting waters hurrying on in endless race below, whilst ever and anon at our feet, through chinks in the wooden flooring, came quick gleams of beryl-green.

We, too, read lessons in the ancient, painted legends above, faint as they were,

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and sometimes hard to decipher; or we turned with loving gaze to the low, narrow openings on either side, where pictures of another kind are set. It was Nature who painted these in her own fresh day-bright colours. Scenes of the battlemented walls of Lucerne and lines of ancient towers—round towers, and watch-towers tall and square—and peaked red roofs; the top of one grey tower crowned by a great glittering image, a knight clad in silver armour, bearing in his knightly hand a banner, which did service as the town weather-cock; green and sunny apple orchards fringed with black fir plantations; white clouds travelling calmly along open spaces of fair blue sky—these were the pictures *we* best loved. Tramp, tramp, tramp! ring the heavy footsteps going by across the bridge. Now a party of soldiers; now half-a-dozen rollicking students shouting out songs in chorus, or a woman with a market-basket on her arm and a little child running by her side; workmen with their tools going home; children just let loose from school, pattering past in joyous bands, with books in knapsacks on their shoulders; a man with spectacles on his nose, walking fast and reading as he walks; a blind man slowly feeling his way with his staff. Tramp,

On the Bridge at Lucerne

tramp, tramp! a ceaseless flow of echoing steps. Above, among the gloom and the shadows of the old rafters, the pictured skeletons lead their grim dance of death, while old spiders spin cunning snares in dark and crooked corners. And never a man, woman, or child lifted a glance as they passed on, nor staid an instant at the chapel grating, or even looked that way; save only one miserable beggar woman, who knelt there in her rags for ever so long, mumbling and telling her beads with a side-glance at us between every prayer. It is the same with the townsfolk of Lucerne as everywhere else the world all over. Never a thought of Death, be he never so near, ready to set the mark of his broad arrow on our nearest and dearest, to cross the threshold of our next-door neighbour, or look in the face of a friend. There is never any time to think of things like this. The world goes too fast.

And the afternoon went by as we lingered on upon that ancient bridge. At night, when the moon was bright and one large star shone like a glowworm in the yellow west, we came there again; and the gaunt skeletons glimmered in the faint light of the chapel lamp—and not a sound was heard, save the solemn swirl of rushing broken waters. . . .

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

It was many years after that dear dead June of long ago—full twenty years after—that a night came when I found myself once more upon the strange old Bridge of Lucerne. . . . It was late afternoon; and somehow I felt as though it were nothing unusual to be there again after all those long years, only that now I was alone, and, to say truth, not there at all save in spirit. With echoing steps the same crowds of Lucerne townsfolk went past, bent on their daily business, and bands of children bent on play. The same sounds were in my ear that I remembered when first I and—had visited the Bridge. And with the sameness of the sounds I seemed to grow sleepy; for I was quite alone, and thinking of nothing, and one is often poor company for one's-self. Overhead I saw the well-remembered scenes of Death. Some quaint, some terrible; just the self-same story—for the dance of Death is never done. The grey ghastly Skeletons; the Enemy, the Friend. As of old the tramp and ring of footsteps beat upon the ear, till the noises ceased at last, and silence fell—the shadowy silence of a Dream. And so the Dark crept on, until dim infrequent lamps began to burn in their places, on the Bridge, and still I lingered on.

On the Bridge at Lucerne

Beyond the turn at the farther end, the sound of steps, approaching nearer and nearer, suddenly broke up the silence, and I saw two men coming slowly round the angle of the bridge. One seemed very tall, and somewhat past middle life and of very noble mien; the other, young and slight, his figure a little bent, his hat a little slouched over the brow. Though the light of the few lamps was so dull, so very dim, it might be quite plainly seen that these two companions had not the look of mere modern, every-day people. There was nothing about them the least in common with the world as we know it to-day. Their countenances and features, their whole aspect seemed to set back the date for some twice a hundred years. One, the older of the two, carried over his shoulder a short, black cloak; otherwise I could perceive nothing very remarkable in the form or fashion of their vesture. Yet plainly both were signed with the seal of another age than ours; and as they went I heard them discourse together in hushed, grave tones.

The Bridge is long; yet while They were still a good way off, some magic already wove unseen spells upon the gloom that lay betwixt myself and them. Nearer and nearer came the two; and as they ap-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

proached, unearthly influences seemed to be shining imperiously from the eyes of one of them; seemed to meet mine, to search through and through the blackness that covered the place between the great beams where I stood. More intent, more magnetic, as it were, grew that deep and penetrating look which, for so much space of time as that wherein one might walk ten paces, gripped me fast. And then, passing away, was for ever gone.

Not until after they had passed out of sight did I remember and picture to myself the face of the younger man, and how it bore something of the semblance of the face of Death,—but Death without fear. There was nothing to repel, in a countenance whose whole aspect seemed to soften into lines of gentlest ruth. The Name, which to me has been long familiar, not many had quickly guessed, nor recognised his likeness to the grisly actor in those stern scenes fast fading overhead among the cobwebs in the raftered roof. The strangers went their way, went past me; and the sound of their voices and far-echoing steps had died away—and I was left alone in the gloom upon the silent Bridge. . . .

After all, what was it but the gleam of

On the Bridge at Lucerne

a vision in one's sleep? A dream, dreamed long years after the first and last time I ever crossed that ancient Bridge or ever saw Lucerne. It is only the smallest fragment of a "baseless fabric," too slight perhaps to tell or to be written, too poor a thing even to be recalled,—save only for a certain intense vividness and strong individuality in those two unknown companions, and because of the deep, soul-piercing glance of one of them. There was nothing indefinite about them. Each walked firmly with all the reality and animation of Life itself. So true to life did they appear, these unknown, visionary strangers of a dream, that even at this hour, after another long interval of time, now, when I think of it, I see them again advancing towards me along the Bridge; again I hear their step on the hollow boards, and feel the unwont, mystic, Power of the Eye.

Who they may have been, or whom they personated, I know not. And yet, not seldom is it known that Life and Death have walked together. Sometimes have they not held parley, one with the other? It is not always the strong or the noble to whom is given to lead the way; nor the long sermon or the large book

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

that leaves always on the mind the deepest mark.

Those strangers were but imagery of the night; created only to vanish as soon as one awakes—to be as though it had never been. Sir Thomas Browne, in one of his "manuscripts," writes thus—

"Half our days we pass in the shadow of the earth; and the brother of death exacteth a third part of our lives. . . . The day supplieth us with truths; the night with fictions and falsehoods. . . . That there should be divine dreams seems unreasonably doubted by Aristotle."

Sometimes—

"Nature else hath conference with profound Sleep, and so doth warning send, by prophetising dreams, what hurt is near, and gives the heavy careful heart to fear."

They who met me on the Bridge belonged to no "prophetising dream," for they spoke no word. They were silent.

In another place it is said that "Dreams are for our instruction"; and in the muirlands of mist, where dreams abide, this may in days far past have been. The nocturnal vision at Lucerne, presaged nothing; it foretold nothing. There was no remembrance of the past bound up with it; no hope of the future contained in it. Yet there still endures within the mind, an impression powerful and lasting—one that has lasted

On the Bridge at Lucerne

these three and thirty years, and remains still freshly vivid.

Curiously disunited and incommunicable is the make up of a dream. A little here and a little there. The tones of a voice heard once. A word we wait for, that is never said; a look that might have been, but never was. Difficulties insuperable, ending in nothing. The shadow of unseen wings; short terrors and endless perplexities. With the night all is begun; with the morning's light all has vanished—even as a dream when one awaketh. . . .

The Bridge of Lucerne is without doubt the dreamiest of bridges.

The Two who crossed that night were unlike the people met in every-day life. I remembered, the two men which were Angels, that stood before the door of Abraham's tent in the evening. . . . Some semblance bore they of immortal spirits, with a Message to deliver. The moment passed; and their lips were dumb. On a page of life's Day Book, I saw it written,—“In the dawn or at moon-rise, at noon or in the night, an hour comes. The same long-past vision shall return to-morrow or long after; and a word be spoken—the message of older years, unuttered then—upon the Bridge at Lucerne.”

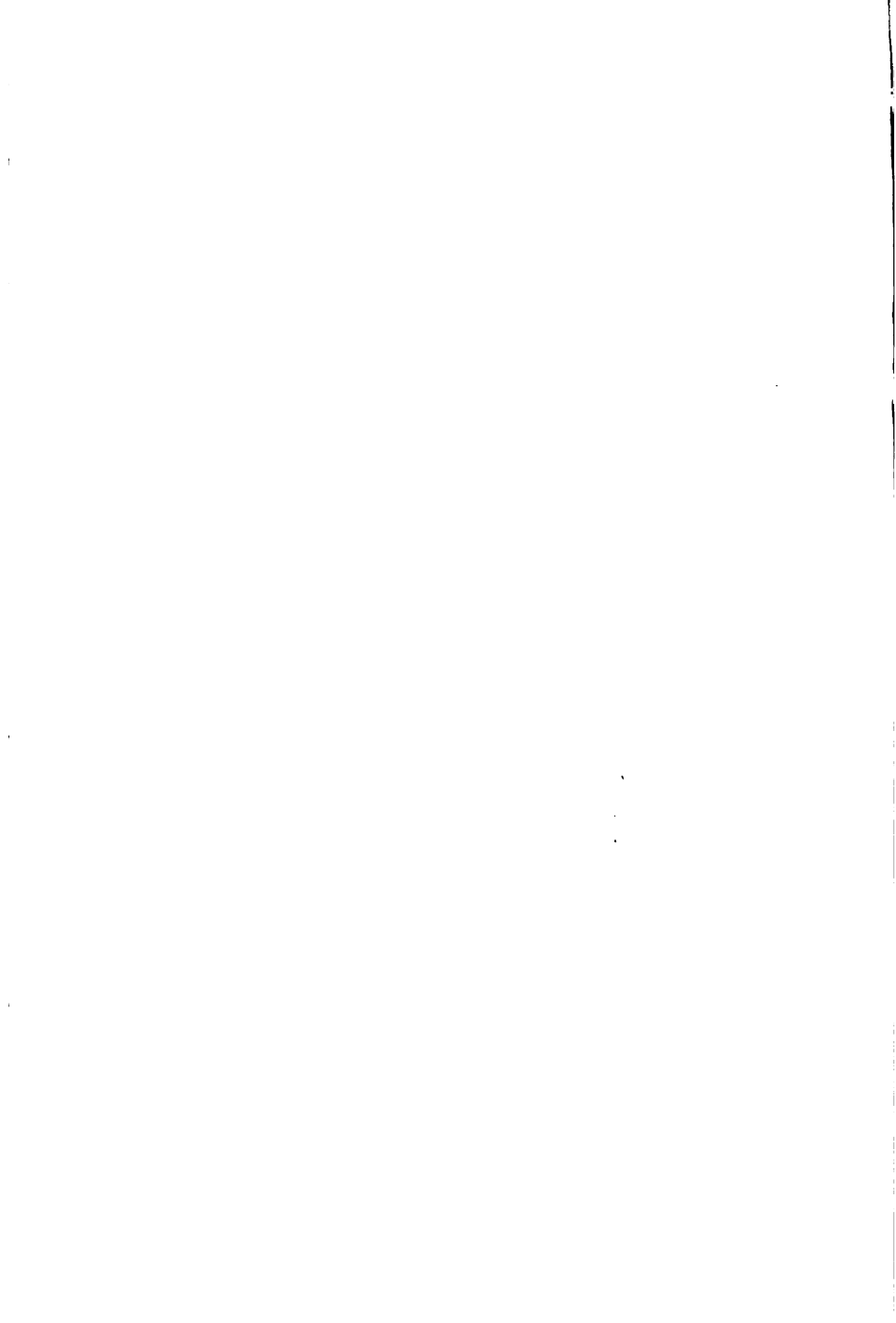


IX

In Praise of Birds



As the flight of a bird through the air.



IX

In Praise of Birds

THERE are not many lovers of beautiful things that are not made continually to feel in their heart it is misery to love! I do not mean the romance of love that belonged to our youth; *that* remains the same as ever, divinely happy, imperishably beautiful. But for such as know what it is to love and sympathise deeply with the lower creation—as it is called—they recognise at every turn the law, hard and fast like a law of Nature itself, causing that which most they love to become a source of greater pain than pleasure. Life would certainly be less hard for some of us did we not care as we do for God's creatures of the animal world. And this leads up to the love most fraught with pain—at least to they who care for them as so many in these days do—the love which is almost universal, the love of birds.

Much of our trouble must be thus explained: that while we know Nature to be so careful of the type that scarcely ever is it

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

lost, the relentless persecution with which birds of all kinds are pursued does threaten the loveliest of their race with extinction and the world with the loss of almost its best and dearest charm.

The love of birds is the earliest fancy of our childhood, the love which grows with our growth, and grows still warmer as we ourselves get older. And the older we are, the sorer the grief we have with it!

There is something so engaging, so strange, so unknown about the birds. The attraction of them, I believe, is felt in some ways even more generally now than formerly; and it spreads in these days in wider circles. An observation I remember hearing from a friend one winter's day as we passed by a holly-tree, all scarlet with its fruit, a red-breast sitting in the midst and singing his little song—would scarcely be ventured now. My friend said, "Do you *really* care for birds? They seem so dull to me!"

A dull world indeed would it be without them! In *L'Oiseau*, by the French author Michelet, occurs a passage which might be thus translated: "Human life becomes commonplace as soon as man is no longer surrounded by the great company of birds—those innocent beings whose movement and whose voices and playfulness are like the smile of Creation."



OPPRESSED WITH A SENSE OF LOSS !



In Praise of Birds

In the country the wild birds are always about us, tame or shy, as the case may be. They always look quite young and happy, taking the liveliest interest in the grass and the flies, and in the labourer's work, or whatever happens to be going on in field or garden. We do not tire of admiring their grace and their quaint ways; and it is only when some blackbird uses "the golden dagger of his bill" to dig out a poor worm from the lawn that—well, we look the other way! While free in the open air, the birds seem never to be ill, never to die unless by accident; they are scarcely ever found "self-dead"—not even under the bushes, where one might think they would often creep away to die. Only in the great frost three or four winters back, in many places some were said to be starved to death, and lay dead upon the ground. In that year, even in gardens where food was regularly put out for them, and their various tastes consulted, they starved in numbers. Green plovers would come close about the very doors and windows, and yet refuse even the chopped meat and bread; and I fear it was a few thrushes and blackbirds who grew fat, and prevented the many sharing their feast.

Birds are forever flitting in and out of the trees, or singing among the branches, or

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

flying happily through the air—who knows whither? Once for full seven years a black and white blackbird lived in peace in our garden; then suddenly the others began to attack him and pull out his feathers. We saw him no more; and the body of even *that* remarkably piebald bird was never found. The poet Burns may have had something of this in mind when he wrote—

“ Ilk happing bird, wee helpless thing,
That i' the merry month o' spring
Delighted me to hear thee sing,
What comes o' thee?
Where wilt thou cower thy chattering wing,
And close thy e'e? ”

The birds are ever round us, but we don't understand them much; and when kept prisoned for years in our cruel cages, cheering us by their song and liveliness, how often do they at last elude our best care, drop from the perch, and die, while we sadly feel we have known nothing about them all the time.

Matthew Arnold, in his pathetic lines on a dead canary, says—how truly too many of us might well confess—

“ Birds, companions all unknown,
Live beside us, but alone;
Finding not, do all they can,
Passage from their soul to man!
Kindness we bestow and praise,
Laud their plumage, greet their lays; ”

In Praise of Birds

Still beneath their feathered breast
Stirs a history unexpressed ;
What they want we cannot guess,
Fail to mark their deep distress,
Dull look on when death is nigh,
Note no change, and let them die."

Yet, little as we understand birds, they assuredly know pretty well all about us ; and they never mistake their friends. A happy few there are, possessors of some kind of secret fascination, whom the whole world of birds will follow and will trust. Of this strange influence the naturalist Charles Waterton is known to have been a memorable example. When he walked in the woods the birds came out to meet him, settling on his shoulder, and coming to his call from any distance. It is told in his memoirs that when the good man died and his body was conveyed in a boat across the lake to the spot where his father was buried, and where he himself desired he might be laid, in a sequestered nook of the park, a flight of birds suddenly appeared, gathering as it went, and followed the boat to its destination. The species to which these birds belonged is not recorded ; most likely they were various. Many kinds of birds there are who hook themselves on to us, as it were, in some strange, slight way, taking part as well as they can in the lives

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of their human neighbours. There is the swallow, herald of spring, who builds under our eaves or in corners of our windows and doorways. The first swallow is hailed with joy, for does she not bring summer from across the sea? In the Roman calendar, I believe, the only mention of natural history is that, on February 24, swallows appear. (In France she is called "the messenger of life," and in Ireland "the devil's bird.") Nightingales, who prefer the come and go of busy life, and delight to nest within sound of a railroad; tomtits, whose pleasure it is to nest in our garden pumps or convenient letter-boxes near our gates; sparrows—of course, they possess themselves of all! I know a first-rate gardener who, strange to tell, has a liking for them. "Sparrows," he says, "have more sense than parrots, only they can't speak." Above all other birds, the robin, as all the world knows, shows most trust and confidence in us,

"The pious bird with the scarlet breast,
Our little English robin,
The bird that by some name or other
All men who know thee call thee brother,
The darling of children and men."

In winter, if allowed to enter at door or window, the robin will come in, will warm itself on our hearthrug, and, if permitted,

In Praise of Birds

will roost every night, for weeks perhaps, perched somewhere in the room. It simply knows not what fear means in the garden when at watch over a man with a spade.

Last winter a robin tapped at our dining-room window, and insisted upon being let in. In the house it lodged and made itself at home until the April following. Every night the bird roosted in a different corner in a different room, upstairs or downstairs. Every day at breakfast and luncheon it hopped on to the table and feasted, helping itself largely to butter in the morning and to cake at luncheon, &c. The confidence shown by such a little thing, in trusting itself among a household of large human people, was indeed touching. In February, when the family went south, the robin descended to the kitchen, living contentedly with the servants until wide-opened doors and windows proclaimed the spring.

But the most singular instance that I have known of a robin's fearlessness was the kind of military instinct, which some years ago led a pair to make their nest at the back of a target at Aldershot. It was in the shooting range of the 4th battalion of the 60th Rifles; and the Colonel of the regiment told me of it at the time. The little pair paid not the least attention to the shots

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

thundering on the target just at the back of their nest. The soldiers were careful not to meddle with them, and the young brood hatched, and were brought up in safety. It may be hoped that they did not all hatch out stone deaf!

Of ill-omened birds, so called, we need not say much, for it is only by the superstition of man that they are said to be so. It has nothing to do with their feeling for us. The handsome black and white magpie is nearly killed off from our woods and fields, and the coming generation will probably know little about its unlucky reputation, though they may chance to find in some antiquated book of north-country folk-lore, that the magpie was the only bird who did not go into the ark with Noah. It preferred to sit outside on the roof, jabbering over the drowned world; and so it has been unlucky ever since. "The boding raven," however, still is likely to survive, since it has been pushed back by civilisation into solitary places and inaccessible crags. In one such haunt, the Raven's Craig, just above a wild lake in Inverness-shire, I have seen them hovering like black blots on the face of the cliff. I have not learning enough to know whether in the earliest times ravens were accounted "unlucky." If so, why were

In Praise of Birds

they chosen from among all the birds of the air for the merciful errand of carrying bread to Elijah in the wilderness? (Did they steal it? They are given to theft!) Also in the Written Word we are assured that "God heareth the young ravens when they cry out unto Him." And nothing of this is said of doves, or of any other white or heavenly kind of bird. An explanation is given in the Egyptian commentary on St. Luke, in the Coptic script by Epiphanius, A.D. 368-402. The passage* is certainly very curious, and I am permitted to transcribe it here. "Why, then, did the evangelist mention no name amongst the birds except ravens only? Because the hen raven, having laid her eggs and hatched her young, is wont to fly away and leave them, on account of the hue of their colour, for when hatched they are red in appearance. Then the Nourisher of all Creation sends to them a little swarm of insects, putting it by their nest, and thus the little ravens are fed until the colour of their body is, as it were, dyed and becomes black. But after seven days the old ravens return, and, seeing that the bodies of their young have become perfectly black like their own, henceforward they take to them and bring them food of their own

* Translated by the Rev. George Horner.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

accord." It is for naturalists to ascertain whether or no this strange account of the young ravens holds good in our day. There is possibly some dark germ of truth conveyed in this Coptic script. Some time ago I was given a letter to read, in which a lady told to a friend the story of a "raven tree" that had stood for ages in her home-field. She wrote that the old shepherd, who had lived in that place all his life, used to watch a pair of ravens, who year after year—the bird is said to live for a hundred—built their nest and brought up young in the branches of a great tree in the midst of the field. The old man used to tell, that it was the custom of the parent birds to fly away and leave their young soon after they were hatched, and not return to them until a fortnight after. On their return the ravens then fed the young ones and looked carefully after them until they left the nest. This seems a curious corroboration of the ancient story, and I believe there is no reason to doubt its accuracy.

It is a long step from the fourth century to the days of Shakespeare and "Macbeth." Lady Macbeth says—

" . . . The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements."

In Praise of Birds

And farther yet to the ballad quoted by Sir Walter Scott—

“ And thrice the raven clapped its wing
Around the towers of Cumnor Hall.”

The appearance of solitary birds in the Forum at Rome was believed to presage the death of Cæsar. Also “the many-wintered crow” shares fully in the un-luck of blackness. In “Plutarch’s Lives” it is told how Cicero went on shore, and entering his house, lay down to repose himself, and how a number of crows settled in the chamber window and croaked dismally in most doleful manner. “One even entered in, and alighting on the bed, sought with its beak to draw off the clothes with which he covered his face. On sight of this the servants began to reproach themselves: ‘Shall we remain spectators of our master’s murder? Shall we not protect him, so innocent and so great a sufferer, when the brute creatures give him marks of their care and attention?’ They carried him towards the sea,” &c.

The downy-feathered, silent-flying bird of wisdom, the owl, is feared by many—“the obscure bird that clamours the livelong night.”

“ It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern’st good-night.”

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

In India the white owl, however, always brings good luck. By the Hindoos it is held sacred to the goddess of prosperity; and for luck's sake it is welcomed to nest and breed in their houses, while the midnight cry of the "Seven Sisters," whoever those strange birds may be, makes those who hear it tremble.

Greater in number, as one likes to believe, are, on the other hand, the Fortunate Birds. There are few, let us hope, among our friends who have not, at some time in their lives, known the meaning of "halcyon days." The halcyon is thus described by Pliny: "This bird, so noticeable, is little bigger than a sparrow. For the more part of her pennage, blew intermingled yet among with white and purple feathers. . . . They laie and sit in mid-winter when daies be shortest; and the times when they are broodie is called halcyon daies; for during that season the sea is calm and navigable, especially on the coast of Sicilie." What visions of calm sea-born loveliness does the quaint old translation call up for us! And is there not a haunting music in these lines?

"Blow, but blow gently, oh, fayre winde,
From the forsaken shore,
And be as to the halcyon kinde
Till we have ferried o'er."

In Praise of Birds

The Swan in legend is fortunate. In a poetic dream of the ancients it was the birds flying up and down the banks of the river of Lethe that "caught the names of the departed, and, carrying them for a little while in their beaks, let them fall into the river, where they would have been lost only that the swans watching near caught a few names and carried them to temples, where they were consecrate." Amongst "the fortunate birds" the dove must be counted as supreme in its peaceful prestige. It is the type of gentleness and innocence, and of faithful, devoted love. And are we not exhorted to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves"? Every movement of the dove is full of grace. It is the emblem of Peace. Alas, that in fairness we have to own the amazing fact of the parent doves' cruel and quarrelsome behaviour! The drying up of the waters after the flood was signified to Noah when the dove came to him in the evening, "And, lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf pluckt off." To this day, year after year for love-seasons immemorial, the dove, when nesting, has carried flowers and leaves in her mouth. In gardens where these birds are allowed their freedom, they will often fly through the windows into the house, and carry off spoil from the flower-glasses. Pink

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

is their favourite colour. I have often seen a pink sweet-pea laid by the male dove tenderly across the neck of his mate as she sits on the nest. It happened only last summer in London, that early one morning a young girl, sleeping with the window open in an upper room in Lowndes Street, awoke to find a stray dove sitting at the foot of her bed—and the bird held a rose-leaf in its bill.

Instances of the old belief in birds and their human sympathies might well be multiplied. Aldovrandi (1527) tells us of the parakeet "who so moved the heart of the Oriental emperor Basilius—the bird repeating for his condemned and incarcerated son, Leo, those lamentations it had heard from the sorrowing women—that Basilius again took his son to his bosom, leaving him his empire as an inheritance." In more recent times there is the extraordinary tale, to be taken for what it is worth, of a parrot who served as chaplain in some ship, reciting prayers to the sailors, and afterwards telling the rosary! Then there is the legend of a white-breasted bird, that is said to appear invariably in the death-chamber when the death occurs of any member of the family it haunts.

In Dean Stanley's "Historical Memorials

In Praise of Birds

of Westminster Abbey," it is recorded, concerning the funeral of Queen Mary II., 1695, that "a robin red-breast, which had taken refuge in the Abbey, was seen constantly on her hearse, and was looked upon with tender affection for its seeming love to the lamented queen." And I may be pardoned for quoting from one of the morning papers an incident which was remarked by many at Queen Victoria's funeral at Windsor on February 4, 1901: "And then befell a thing so strange and beautiful as to almost pass belief. Just as the jewelled crown upon the coffin passed into the open air a dove flew out from over the chapel door. There it circled for a moment, when its mate flew out, and both together those grey birds flew slowly, side by side, over the quarters of the military knights and on towards the tomb at Frogmore."

There is more to tell about birds than may be said in a day. Volumes might be filled with the wonders of their life-histories, with the endless story of their intelligence, their power of affection to man, or of devotion to their offspring. I have for long known the story of two incidents illustrating these two qualities in birds. The first * was told me by a relative, to whom it happened

* From Mary Boyle's "Autobiography."

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

many long years ago when she was a child. "Mary Boyle was walking with her mother, when we were attracted to a small cottage by the exquisite singing of a thrush, which hung in a wicker cage outside the door. We stood listening, and then my mother entered and made acquaintance with the old couple within, asking would they be willing to part with the thrush to her? At first a blank look came over the old man's face; but he was poor and ailing, and at last a sum was named, the double of which was paid by my mother, who sent a servant next morning for the bird.

"Disappointment resulted. The cage was placed in our drawing-room window, but not a sound, not a note came from the melancholy thrush, who drooped and hung his head as if moulting. We fed it, we coaxed it; but it remained silent. My mother was indignant. She had not pressed the old people; she had but asked were they willing to sell the bird; she had given them double the sum asked; it looked as if another had been palmed off instead of the magnificent songster.

"We gave the thrush several days' trial, but at length we sent for its late owner. The door opened; in he came, hat in hand. My mother rose, armed with some mild

In Praise of Birds

rebuke. But neither could speak, for no sooner did the old man appear than the bird leaped down from its perch, spread its wings, and broke into so triumphant a song of joy that the whole room vibrated. 'What, pretty Speckledy,' said the old man, approaching; 'you know me, then, do you?' And the thrush kept flapping his wings, dancing with joy. It was without a doubt the same bird; but, like the Hebrew captives, it could not sing in a strange land. 'Take it back,' said my mother; 'I would not part such friends for all the world.'"

The other anecdote used to be told by the late Lady Elizabeth Villiers, and occurred on her own property in Holland. On a tree close to a house, within a short distance of the river or canal, there was a storks' nest, with young ones. The roof of the house caught fire one day; and though the flames did not actually reach the tree, the heat became scorching. So the mother stork flew down to the water, got into it, and drenched her breast; then, returning to her young, she spread the mass of cool wet feathers all over them. This she repeated over and over again, flying to the river, going down into the water, and returning, her plumage drenched with wet. And thus the nest was saved, and the tender nestlings

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

were preserved alive until the fire had been got under and all was safe. The truth of this remarkable story was vouched for by more than one eye-witness.

One need not, indeed, be surprised at anything a bird does, when we consider the commoner every-day marvels of their unerring instinct; the whole mystery of their lives.

The Greeks believed that birds were created first of all things—"an airy antemundane throng"—and the Latin poet Lucretius held that it was from birds men first learned music. Matthew Arnold wrote—

"Proof they give, too, primal powers
Of a prescience more than ours.
Teach us while they come and go
When to sail and when to sow.
Cuckoo calling from the wild,
Swallow trooping in the sedge,
Starling swirling from the hedge,
Map our seasons, make our year."

In all ages birds have been the poet's favourites. At the dawn of English poetry, half a thousand years ago, Chaucer, with his passionate love of Nature, says, in "The Fowles' Assembly"—

"On every bough the birdes I heard sing
With voice of angel in their armonie,"

and then he makes a list of about thirty-

In Praise of Birds

seven "fowles," with their personal characteristics, sketched in one or two lines each—done to the life, as none but a poet and acute observer of Nature could do; as, for instance, "The false lapwing full of trecherie," "The cuckoo ever unkind," "The frostie feldefare," and so on.

After Chaucer came other of our poets: a long procession whose praise of birds, enshrined in lovely thoughts and undying numbers, is left to us and to all time—a legacy of delight.

To name but a few amongst some of the best-known lines. Who can forget Keats' "Nightingale"?—

". . . Light-wingèd Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green and shadows numberless
Singest of summer in full-throated ease."

Or Wordsworth to the same sylvan minstrel?—

"O nightingale, thou surely art
A creature of a fiery heart.
These notes of thine, they pierce and pierce,
Tumultuous harmony and fierce.
Thou sing'st as if the god of wine
Had helped thee to a valentine!"

And in another exquisite little poem of Wordsworth's, the lark is—

"Ethereal minstrel, pilgrim of the sky,"

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and—

“Type of the wise, who soar but never roam,
True to the kindred points of heaven and home.”

Shelley, in his “Ode to the Lark,” addresses it as “Thou scorner of the ground,” and F. Tennyson—

“How the blythe lark runs up the golden stair
That leans through cloudy gates from Heaven to earth.”

Stray fragments these, from rich stores of song, by poets inspired with “all that ever was of joyous, clear, and fresh,”—by the music of those very skylarks that all the world orders without a pang as a dainty dish for dinner, whose bodies the careless crown sees and passes by unmoved, lying heaped in every poulterer's window or piled in open crates beside the door.

I possess an old bird-book of 1791—in which, by the way, are figured in colour two sorts of dodo—where we find that “in the neighbourhood of Dunstable, 4000 dozens of larks have been taken for the London market, between September and February.” A trifle indeed, those 48,000, compared to the 116,000 humming-birds that were sold in London wholesale shops only a year or two ago for ornamenting ladies' attire! If so many skylarks over a hundred years ago were required for the table or for confine-

In Praise of Birds

ment in cages, what must the consumption now be! The old book adds that "in summer they fly and sing so much, and are so much engaged in the care of their young, they are always lean." Poor, devoted little songsters! Nest and multiply as they may, a check must come sooner or later if the ever-increasing population of our cities persist in eating them; and even the blue heavens where they sing will at last be empty of their music. We are often assured that the larks sold for cooking are mostly fieldfares. This may be true, just in the same way that "plovers' eggs are oftener jackdaws'."

In Lockhart's "Life of Sir Walter Scott" it is told how, at the funeral of his daughter, the wild music of a lark singing in the sky above the open grave mingled with the solemn service for the dead, and how Scott's friend, Dean Milman, as he read the service, heard the singing and was profoundly touched. One does not read Milman much now, but he described the incident well in the little poem he wrote afterwards—

"I watch thee lessening, lessening to the sight,
Still faint and fainter winnowing
The sunshine with thy dwindling wing,
A speck, a movement in the ruffled light,
Till thou wert melted in the sky,
An undistinguished part of bright infinity."

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Mrs. Browning has a lovely thought about England and her migrant birds. I think it occurs in "Aurora Leigh"—

"Islands so freshly fair
That never hath bird come nigh them,
But from his course in air
Hath been won downward by them."

The name of well-nigh every English bird, whether common or unfamiliar, is found scattered throughout the best poetry of our land—immortalised in song. Burns has here and there an exquisite touch, such as—

"Within the bush, her covert nest
A little linnet fondly prest,
The dew all chilly on her breast,
Sae early in the morning. . . ."

Tennyson knew well our birds and loved them, and he watched them with the keenest observation. Browning also loved them. Every one knows his lines about the thrush—

"That's the wise thrush ; he sings each song twice over,
Lest we should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture."

The least observing of us all knows the joy of listening in the spring to those first delightful notes ; and often would we express our pleasure—if we could—with something of the tender charm of Mortimer Collins'

In Praise of Birds

lines to a thrush singing in the lime-trees—
often would we say with him—

“God’s poet hid in foliage green
Sings endless songs himself unseen ;
Right seldom come his silent times.
Linger, ye summer hours serene !
Sing on, dear thrush, amid the limes !

Thou mellow angel of the air !
Closer to God art thou than I ;
His minstrel thou, whose brown wings fly
Through silent æther’s sunnier climes.
Ah, never may thy music die !
Sing on, dear thrush, amid the limes ! ”

That lover of the beautiful, Lord Leighton—himself an ardent and accomplished musician—delighted in the music of birds. I remember, years ago, at the time when people used to bore their friends by inducing them to catalogue their likes and dislikes in a tiresome drawing-room album, young Leighton wrote down as his greatest pleasure, “To walk in the garden and listen to the birds singing.”

The cuckoo must have a page or two to itself.

*The Cuckoo thus addressed a Starling who had flown
from town.*

“What say they in town of our melodies ?
What say they of the Nightingale ?”
“The whole town praise her song.”

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

"And of the Lark?" cried he again.

"Half the town praise her tuneful throat."

"And of the Blackbird?" continued he.

"Her, too, they praise; now and then."

"I must ask one more question:

What do they say of Me?"

"That," said the Starling, "I know not:

For I have not heard a single person speak of thee."

"Then will I proceed," he said, "to revenge myself

On the ingratitude of Men,

And will everlastingly speak of myself."

(From the German).

In the sweetest season of all the year, in the glorious, glowing spring-time, amid a thousand feasts for eye and ear, which fill our hearts with new delight each season of their return, because they *have* returned again and again, and have been known and loved and longed for through all the years of our life, there is no lovelier sight than the blossoming May, no sound more rich with strange wild melody than that twofold note, "at once far off and near," which fails not to give back to us a moment's childhood each time we hear it, and say to one another "The cuckoo has come!"

The cuckoo has come! and the sunshine and the flowers, and the green leaves, and long, warm evenings are at hand, and prim-roses will bloom out under trees and hedge-row banks in fragrant garlands, while the young, growing grass, gathers hour by hour

In Praise of Birds

a deeper, livelier green. And there is the hum of bees in the air, and a singing of birds throughout the land. This is what the cuckoo means to us. This is how we translate her music, in the language of our own human feeling.

To many a small mother though, among the feathered ones, her song is not so agreeable. In more than one sense the cuckoo is a strange, mysterious creature, and her ways past finding out. Wordsworth felt that, when he wrote—

“Oh, cuckoo, shall I call thee bird,
Or but a wandering voice?”

Truth and fable have ever been mixed up in her history. Are there cock and hen cuckoos, or are they all hens? or does the male bird remain alone all the year in that island where it is always summer, somewhere in the heart of Siberia? Somehow she has got a bad name for sucking little birds' eggs to make her voice clear; but this is quite as untrue as that it is unlucky to hear the cuckoo before the nightingale. It is most unfair to call her “slandrous cuckoo,” as in the old ballad. I would rather quote—

“Sweet bird, thy bower is ever green,
Thy song is ever clear;
There is no Winter in thy song,
No Winter in thy year.”

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

And it is palpably unjust to compare the meaningless repetition of some hollow phrase to aught so sweet as "a cuckoo cry." She has without doubt some good and valid reason for putting her children out to nurse—it seems, indeed, a wise arrangement; for she might build an uncomfortable nest, and a nature wild and roving like hers would make but a poor "head" of the family. In Denmark the Danes have an old legend that excuses the cuckoo's neglect of her family on other grounds.

They say that when first the cuckoo's note is heard in their woods, every village maid kisses her hand and asks, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! when shall I married be?" The old people, too, bent down with age and sickness, question also, "Cuckoo! cuckoo! when shall I be released from this world's cares?" The bird obligingly answers "cuckoo!" for the number of years that will pass 'ere death or the bridal come. Now as the old often live on to a very great age and many girls unmarried die, the poor cuckoo has much ado answering every question put to her. And thus the summer passes, and the season for nest-building goes by, and there is no time for her to make her nest; so she has to lay her precious egg in any other nest she can find. I am sorry to

In Praise of Birds

have to confess that sometimes, it is said, a deserted nest is chosen. But this may only be a naturalist's tale. I don't myself believe in it. Little is really known of the cuckoo's habits. It visits almost every country in the world, and in every land its note is the same. "Cuckoo!" is heard in Lapland and in Siberia, in Japan, Egypt, Asia, and all over Europe. At the end of the season it is said to go away into Africa, with our turtle-dove; and in Italy it is then called by a name signifying "Turtle leader." The American cuckoo is yellow-billed, but otherwise differs only from ours in her domestic character, which is undeniably virtuous. The American builds her own nest and hatches her own eggs, like all good mothers, with the addition of one rather curious circumstance, viz. young birds of three weeks' old are found along with new-laid eggs in the same nest. And so we come round to the real cause, perhaps, of our scapegrace cuckoo's unnatural conduct, that it is her nature to lay her eggs (in great numbers) at intervals of a week or more. And the dilemma in which she finds herself is this, that in England, if nowhere else—

"In July she prepares to fly;
Come August, *go she must.*"

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

and then where would her unfledged young be? One wonders, however, how it is that our cousins' cuckoo across the Atlantic appears not to have found this way out of the difficulty; for the English cuckoo's plan does seem for once, the most astute.

Amongst modern artists of fame, Landseer felt the joyous beauty of the wings of birds, and painted them to the life. In the house where Landseer lived in St. John's Wood (since pulled down) there was a fresco, painted by him on the wall in the dining-room, of long-winged seagulls in undulating flight above a breaking sea. After him, Stacy Marks distinguished himself by his paintings of every species and kind of bird. Lear and others devoted their art to portraiture of the many-coloured parrots.

After dwelling thus on the true appreciation of birds by some of the first intellects of our time—and before—the contrast is sharp indeed when we turn to consider the manner of appreciation of them, common with women nowadays. For some of us the love of birds is accompanied by the intense pain of realising how their lives are everywhere wasted: a pain which must surely be unknown to the thousands who, without the least compunction, crown their heads with dead birds, and glory in that badge of

In Praise of Birds

cruelty—an egret's plume. This particular plume—"all imitation now," the milliners say—I never see, without thinking of the African tribe who carry within their mat of hair a store of some kind of feathers, and who, whenever they kill a man, take out a feather, dip it in his blood, and stick it on their heads. So the white egret plume, worn in hat or bonnet, is always to my fancy dyed red by the sacrifice of unhappy birds, bleeding and perishing near their desolated nests.

I was told a year ago by a London milliner that "ladies now refused to wear 'ospreys,'" as she called them; "so much had been said. But they were insisting on whole birds in their hats." There will yet be enough for them—*while they last*. An estimate of the quantities still sold, I fear, in London alone is nothing less than appalling. Amongst a number of other birds, such large numbers as 11,352 ounces of egret and 110,490 humming-birds are not less than appalling. No market in the world can long supply a demand so huge as this. Few need now to be reminded that the foolish word "osprey," used in relation to plumes, is purely shopkeepers' ornithology. They mean egret—a name of most evil repute, since the cruelties connected with the killing of them have been made

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

public. Yet so ignorant is the world at large of the natural history of birds, that some are still taken in by the name. A very charming lady, whose hats are certainly guiltless of aught but ostrich feathers, whilst speaking of the wearing of birds, stared with surprise when I explained that the milliners' "osprey" is in reality a small species of white stork, a native of Syria, Florida, and other hot countries. "Why," said she, "I've seen them alive! and they are nothing of the sort. They are dark-coloured birds, like hawks. I saw them flying about a loch in Scotland; the gillie pointed them out to me, and he said they were ospreys!"

In London, when one sees the fashionable world of women driving about the streets or piously attending church service, in hats crowned with egret, or with long bird-of-paradise plumes bleached white and streaming in the wind, one marvels how it should be possible that these distinguished dames can possess minds so untrained—in a sense so uneducated—be so relentless, so lost to pity, as not to know or care whether whole races of birds, the loveliest and most innocent of created beings, be killed off (and mostly under circumstances of great barbarity), simply in order to make trimming for their hats.

In Praise of Birds

I have wondered also if the ladies of "London Society" are aware of the fact that they are by no means supreme in this deplorable fashion; if they really know that in the matter of feathers they are far outdone by their suburban and country-town imitators. Suburban railway platforms are generally crowded with hats piled up in birds and feathers. And the fashion lasts till summer brings artificial roses to replace the bird-skins. It seems a little singular that apparently the only class who still habitually wear ostrich feathers—but never a bird-skin—are, or until recently were, the flower-sellers of Oxford Street and elsewhere. Their narrow means can scarcely account for it, for the rarest kingfisher or most brilliant ruby-crested humming-bird costs but fourpence. Thus it is, however. For my own part, I would a thousand times rather copy those poor drooping ostrich plumes of the London flower-girls—if plumes must be worn—than flaunt my hat in the finest "creation" of dried birds and egrets that the most fashionable of London shops could supply.

It is agreed by most people, I believe, that any appeal to woman, as woman, to give up for humanity's sake any practice, however cruel, if sanctioned by custom, is absolutely

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

unavailing. As well attempt to melt with tears the core of the living rock !

An example, however, was set by "mere men !" a few years since ; and now in the army egret plumes are no longer worn. Yet women, who so readily emulate their brothers in sport or smoke, have failed to follow, whole-hearted, a lead like this.

To an increasing scarcity in foreign hat-birds, rather than to any appreciable decrease of demand, is due, one fears, the less universal wear of egret. I was lately told that while two years ago the going out after service at St. Paul's, Knightsbridge, was like "a tempest of egret," last year only three or four were counted.

Could English women oftener seek to apply their hearts to the wisdom of showing mercy to their little brothers and sisters the birds, or sometimes find a moment's time to think over the thousands of beautiful lines in which our greatest poet-teachers have sung the Praise of Birds, could they less seldom remember this, they would surely entirely cease to follow the senseless dictates of fashion in feminine attire—before it is Too Late.

Let us brush away, if possible, the impression of a subject so far from pleasant by a few words from Bishop Hall, in allusion to

In Praise of Birds

our friend, our little English robin : “ Every bird can sing in a clear Heaven, in a temperate spring ; that one as most familiar, so is most commended, that sings merry notes in the midst of a shower, or in the dead of winter.”

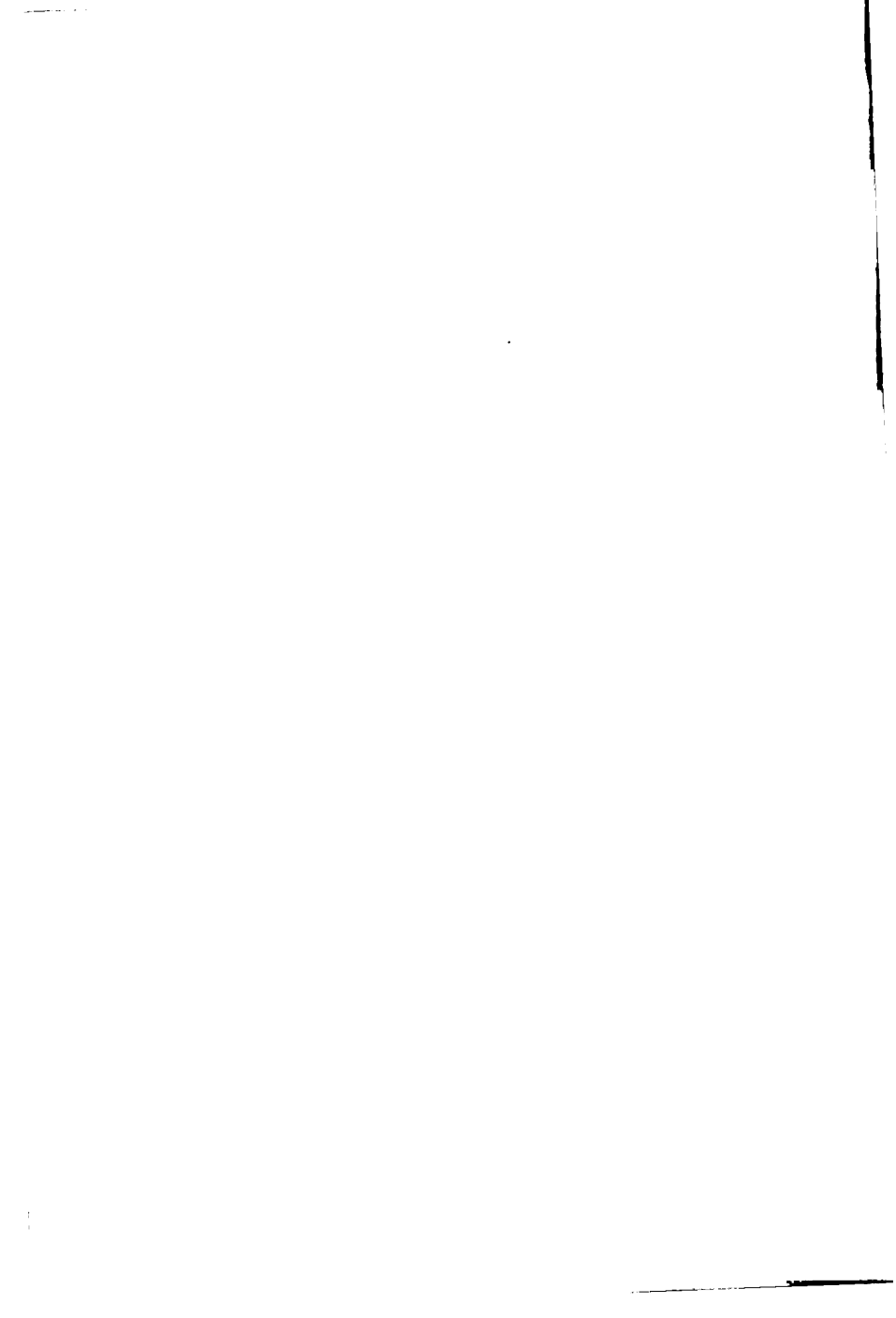


X

Weeds of the Garden



The verdant clothing of the field.



X

Weeds of the Garden

"Those wicked weeds."

—CHAUCER.

I FEAR that to say so may be thought a sign of poor gardening; yet, nevertheless, I have to acknowledge that I admire weeds. There are some, indeed, whom I love like old friends, whilst the grace and beauty of some are a never-failing delight. Not, of course, things like shepherd's purse—interesting as that really is—or groundsel, or chickweed; although even these have their charm, and groundsel especially must not be too severely dealt with, since whenever one sees it—as Lord Rosebery pleasantly said once—"one thinks of one's canary!" Also when I confess to a love of weeds, I do not refer to stinging nettles, who come up singly never, but always in tribes and families, always making one think of ruined homes and "doleful haunts where satyrs dance." Nor do I love afflictions such as summer cress or hound's-

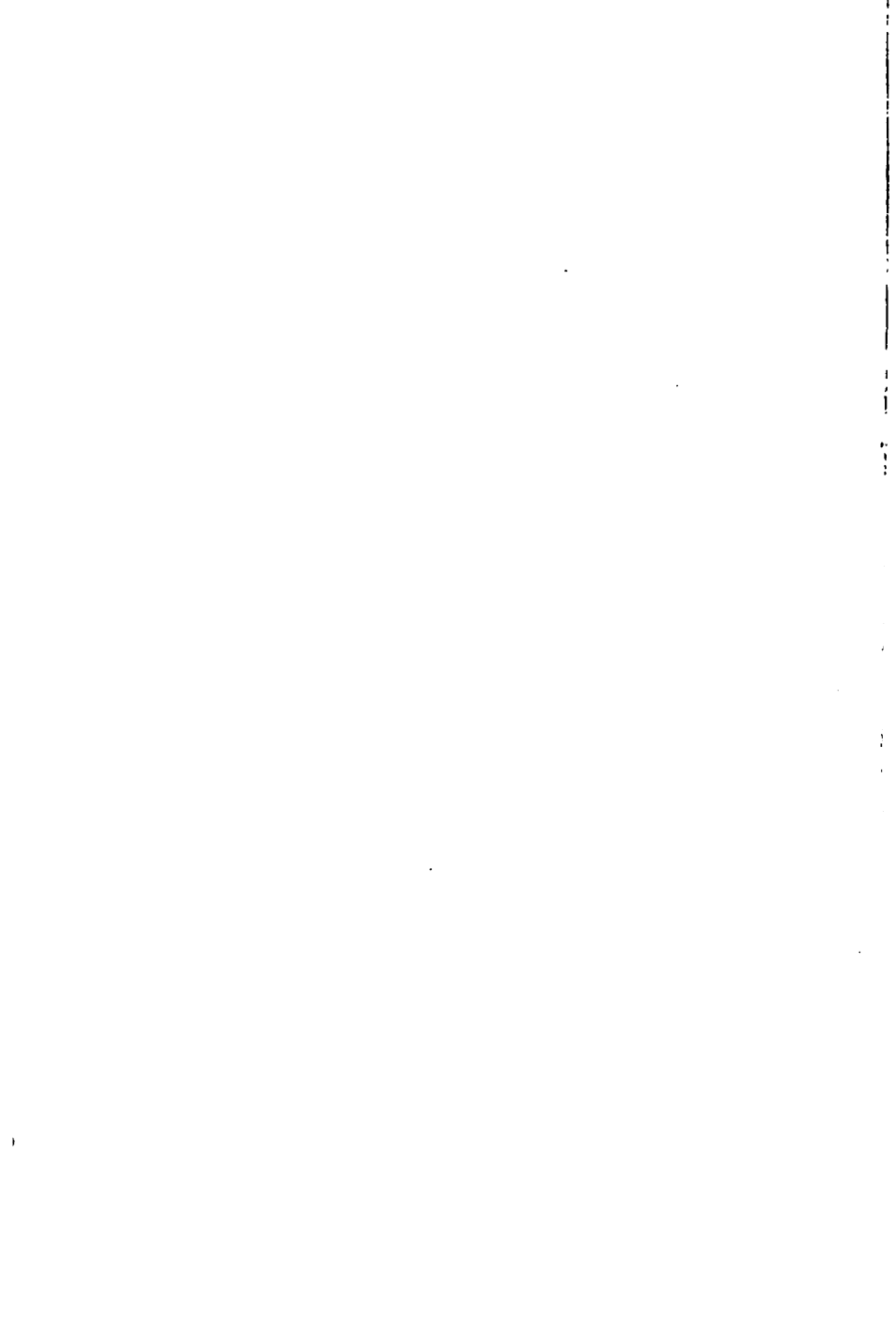
The Peacock's Pleasaunce

tongue, and others which insist on reappearing summer after summer, in spite of our persistent efforts at discouragement; nor corn sow-thistle, or dandelion, each exquisitely leaved, but each a worry because it "comes" too much. Also one has no regard for "the bishop's weed." Why "the bishop's" it were hard to say. One detects in it nothing especially episcopal. By the confused description in Gerarde's "Herbal" it would seem to be honewort. In Paxton it is Sison Ammi, from the Celtic *sisum*, a running stream. This sison one should call an evil weed were it not so harmless. Anyhow, it is too tiresome for words. Paxton is good enough to inform the reader that "the seeds merely require sowing in common garden soil in spring." Who would be so rash as to sow it? It suffices to receive a parcel of any kind of plants from the North, and bishop's weed is pretty sure to be amongst the packing, and you are safe to stock your garden with it, without the faintest hope of ever getting rid of it, for the root runs far and deep.

The chief interest of garden weeds seems to rest with those that spring up naturally of themselves; which, as it were, belong to the soil. They are more in number, I think, than those sown by birds or in other ways



HE WALKS IN BEAUTY . . .



Weeds of the Garden

imported. It is not easy, however, sometimes, to know for certain which are indeed true natives of the place.

I should like to begin the list of garden weeds with such as may be supposed to belong naturally to my own little plot in South Bucks, and by naming my favourite of all, the greater celandine, in Somerset called the witches' flower (*Chelidonium majus*). So pleasant to me is this dear plant that every spring, when the young growth may not at once be visible, I suffer from acute fears lest the stock is lost; yet in the end there is no disappointment: soon or late the weed I love is sure to reappear.

Great celandine, when it has attained its proper size, is full of grace. It is satisfactory all round. It is an "elegant" plant in the old true meaning of the word—that is, "made with care and taste, excellent; highly wrought." Seldom is it seen in groups of more than three or four, oftener it comes singly, and shadowy places seem to be the most agreeable to it. There is just one drawback—the sinister-looking orange drop that oozes from the end of a stalk when broken. Yet even that ugly drop is possessed of healing qualities. The leaf is boldly and exquisitely cut, and the whole plant bears a sort of stately presence, lowly

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

in stature though it be—an aspect of strength and delicacy combined. Great celandine is certainly my best-loved garden weed. He is said to be named “chelidon” after the swallow, since he first appears in spring with the swallow, and dries up when swallows depart. Our celandines near the house—they seldom wander far—began to spring this year just as the first swallows arrived. As for his withering away, the plant knows his time, but I do not; since I am always absent from the garden from July until autumn.

For the lesser celandine I fear I have little fancy. Poets praise it and children love it; therefore not to care for it must surely be my own mistake. Just once or twice it is seen in the garden nestling among the roots of a rose-bush, with wide-open petals glistening in the sun like gold; and then I have almost liked it. It then has somehow seemed to lose its perhaps rather “common” look.

Early in February or March, under the old trees of a lime avenue just outside the garden wall, our little celandine luxuriates. Suddenly in April last, there appeared one day a purple glow—the purple of wild sweet violets—between the polished leaves and blossoms of celandine. The violets made

Weeds of the Garden

netted patchwork in the midst, and they seemed to redeem the almost vulgar boldness of the little yellow-flowered plant ; a violet leaning against every other green leaf-disc of celandine !

Another favourite is a handsome weed that stays with us in beauty from about the first week of December, until put an end to by the hot suns of summer. Gardening and botanical authorities have cruelly named it *Helleborus fœtidus*. Yet except for a kind of pungent odour in the leaf when crushed, nothing can be discovered to warrant the unpleasant name. Had I had the luck to be its godmother, it should have been named something that meant green-flowered, or charming, or "the plant with sad-coloured leaf." As usual, it is next to impossible clearly to make it out in the gardening books, at least in those I have been able to consult. Mostly these descriptions seem to read as though the authors had never beheld the plants they describe ; and when there are illustrations the case is worse : they seem to be coloured to look pretty and—except when photographed—are unnaturally twisted about so as to fit the page.

Helleborus fœtidus, if thus it must be, seems to have been with us always, more or less. At least, I cannot remember when it was not

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

here. It grows only in one special bit of the garden, within the shaded angle of an old brick wall. I do not know of the narrow boundary being ever overstepped in the course of these many years past, save once only, when one individual seedling contrived to transfer itself from the shady to the sunny side of the old wall. Here it rejoiced in the hot south with equal zest as formerly in the cool shade. Hellebore seems to be not particular about either aspect or soil, thriving, as it does here, both in deep garden mould and in gravel. Last December the abundant blossoms of our hellebore weed were conspicuously attractive, and thus they remained unchanged until the first days of April. Even then the light-green panicked cymes, in such good contrast with the dark foliage, retain their beauty while the flower quietly seeds itself away. Long before the hellebore has failed, euphorbia, or cape spurge, begins to dot the borders here and there with the columnar grace of his tall stem. Euphorbia never comes in such numbers as to require much clearing away. It may not be a feeling of admiration that rivets attention to this curious weed; it is more perhaps the strange symmetry of the set of its leaves. An equal measure of parts is no unusual characteristic among plants, yet

Weeds of the Garden

euphorbia displays this exact symmetry in rather an uncommon degree. The leaves are said to point north, south, east, and west; and I believe this to be true—at least it is thus with the euphorbias in my garden. They may make a mistake sometimes, but as a rule they know what they are about—they know the points of the compass.

What mysterious magnetism is it that moves these strange leaves? What secret stirring of the slow white sap?

A fine plant of euphorbia rises against one of our walls, and had attained already, by May 13, a height of three and a half feet, with an exceedingly massive stem. Downwards from the budding summit, where are seven buds instead of the usual four, the colour of the stem is all of a lovely lilac, fading palely into green. The leaves—blunted at the end, and each one's centre broadly veined in dull white—show a kind of careless vigour. This great euphorbia seems scarcely to know what to do with his own immense vitality; and before long the firm smooth pillar will be spoilt by the branching out—Brussels-sproutwise—of little sprigs all the way down. The bud bears in some degree the semblance of a serpent's head, and so the plant has been called "Medusa" or "Medusa's head." And also it is said that a dead plant will

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

come to life again and bloom if placed in warm water. I have not tested the truth of this.

If we climb down from these grand incomprehensibles to the earth around them, which in March they have not yet begun to pierce, we find in that early month numbers of the little field veronica about the garden, beginning to twinkle in the morning sun. It is not of much account, being so very small. Yet I have seen the furrows of a ploughed field just outside the garden literally blue with it, as it lay there in countless multitudes. As the season ripens, veronica agrestis goes its way and gives no trouble. After this come a few more weeds, both favourites and enemies. In their order of precedence they are these: draba verna, robin-run-the-hedge, bryony (black and white), enchanter's nightshade, nettles (stinging, white and yellow), pimpernel, fumitory, corydalis lutea, nightshade, convolvulus, crane's-bill, mare's-tail, &c.

Draba verna is a sweet little thing, and even in childhood I had learnt its pretty name. When it first flowers in February, it is like a delicate miniature, so exquisite is the finish of the tiny white flowers set on their tender stalklet. Draba verna is very cheerful in itself, and likes to make its home

Weeds of the Garden

on some old mossy ledge, perhaps half-way up a western wall. Such a position has been chosen by it here, and here a numerous family party are established, looking the picture of happy well-being. At times its fancy is for a number to grow in patches on some sunny bit of lawn where a big tree may keep the grass spare and dry. I have enjoyed the sight of our little plant on the wall all through March and part of April. But towards the end of the latter it will have grown too tall and scraggy. It will look gigantic, towering above a new settlement of forget-me-nots, which have since taken possession of the moss-grown ledge, crowding over every inch around the draba roots. These forget-me-nots are the most wonderful Lilliputians imaginable. Each flower is almost smaller than the head of the very tiniest minikin pin; yet the six square inches of them gathered together give a perceptible sense of blueness to the bit of old wall. The sky-blue is as bright, and the starry form as perfect in every detail, as is displayed in any of those finer forms of forget-me-not that set with turquoise the wild margins of our English rivers.

Robin-run-the-hedge, or goose-grass, or cleavers, is as tiresome as any of our most

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

sparing vigilance will keep the beautiful destroyer in check. Yet, for me at least, what courage is needed to tear away a thing so utterly lovely as the snow-white convolvulus flower of it! Once I asked my gardener, "Was there *any* place at all where bindweed might be in peace and have leave to live? His reply was curt and decisive: "There's NO place."

Our wicked withy-wind must be related nearly to the beautiful Indian moon-flower, the pure white convolvulus, that is said to open only to the moon. Although this is not, alas! numbered among our English garden weeds, it is known and loved of many an exiled heart. Here is an English-woman's impression of her first sight of the moon-flower in her Indian garden one evening of last December, in a letter home.

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"I went in the garden after tea to feed the hungry fishes in the fountain, and then the gardener brought to me the most wondrous white flower, the moon-flower. He took me to see the plant itself in a tiny pot, climbing up a trellis, and told me two of the buds were just going to come out; and sure enough when I arrived, there was one great bud quivering slightly on its long stalk, and

Weeds of the Garden

in about five minutes the petals began slowly, slowly to unfurl, till I could see right into its clear transparent depths. I think it must have taken quite fifteen minutes to fully expand; but I could not wait all the time. Long enough to be reminded of Shelley's lines about the rose—

“‘Till, fold after fold, to the fainting air
The soul of her beauty and love lay bare.’”

The prettiest weed of the garden, after all—and the sweetest if you bruise the leaf of it—is the common crane's-bill. I find in an old family Herbal the remark that “very few know it by the name of crane's-bill, but every one knows a geranium.” That was printed in the days when pelargoniums and geraniums were all *geraniums*. Now and then our crane's-bill will make some shady garden-corner rosy, or it courts full sunshine hanging from the grey limestone of the rockery. The delicate markings of the small flowers seem, as it were, “put in” with a touch; and so elusive is the colour, one knows not if to call it pink or rose-lilac.

No highly cultivated florist's flower could be more alluring in its beauty. How many such, indeed, are cultivated up to so huge a doubleness and machine-made regularity that a point is reached where all true distinction

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

unbeloved garden weeds. It begins early, and, if let alone, would soon smother up everything. The Greeks, I believe, called goose-grass *philanthron*, because they attributed to a love of mankind its tiresome clinging habit. If this were true, our remorseless pulling-up of it would indeed seem hard. A much smaller, more refined goose-grass grows in one, and only in one, little bit of shrubbery amongst ivy and yellow *kerria* and *bramble*. This may be *galium tricornis* (though it answers not in the least to Anne Pratt's description). It never wanders, and makes a pretty variety mixing with the dark-leaved ivy.

White *bryony* is springing fast in May, already seeking to support itself on yew hedges, box, or laurel. The small green flower comes much later, with all its furnishment of most sentient, most intelligent tendrils. You may almost think you *see* them, stretching out like hands, to clasp and hold a branch or stick, or aught else like to make support for the tender shoots. I do not know if ever the question has been decided whether tendrils twist always from right to left or the other way. Once I made a series of observations, but that is so long ago I forget the result, if any, and it does not matter much. In the case of

Weeds of the Garden

shells, they, as is well known, almost invariably turn or twist one way. And if by chance one is discovered going the other way, the specimen is greatly prized. Sea and land shells, garden snails, &c., all go the same way. The law held good in primal ages when this old world was young; for fossil ammonites, large or small, thousands of years ago did precisely the same. Even flat, fan-like shells will always spread from left to right. Whichever way its tendrils have to turn, we give our white bryony leave to clamber where it will; nor is it torn down until the green, round berry begins to redden, when, having lost self-control, the plant has lost its charm.

Black bryony, *Tamus communis*, is rare in our countryside, and we have within this garden only two. These two plants are cared for and cherished, for black bryony is handsomer than white. The black has no tendrils, yet it manages well enough; and, as for its leaf, I know no other leaf so satisfying to the eye as this, in the plain sincerity of its pure outline.

Another climber which I think is native to all gardens in every place everywhere—the fatal bindweed or withy-wind—would strangle in an unrelenting weak embrace the entire pride of the garden. Only an un-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

while yellow galium, with flowerstalks rising a foot or more, makes gay the sunny banks outside, that one can breathe this mixed sweetness. Galium is far less vigorous of growth here in the South, where, according to Gerarde, "it wanders hither and thither upon the ground, supporting its yellow spikes upon the herbage or stones near at hand." Red lamium, always rather coarse-looking, is inclined to be a tiresome weed; though now and then it is impossible not to enjoy the dash of red given suddenly by a cluster of it at the edge of a border, in the grass, or somewhere else where it ought not to be; a short-lived triumph, to be too quickly ended as soon as the gardeners "come round." Yellow nettle, weasel-snout, or as in Oxfordshire, "dumb nettle" (*Lamium galeobdolon*), steadfastly keeps its place in a little sunless grassy bit at the foot of a north wall under the stable clock. As a garden weed the plant perhaps is rare. When it first appeared, I believed it to be a herb of note, and at once gave it welcome in the spot it chose, amongst a few archangels (spared for their beauty) and rambling potentilla. Yet the yellow nettle is quite common in neighbouring woods, where it contrasts cheerfully with blue drifts of hyacinth. I know not why dead nettle is "archangel," except for the

Weeds of the Garden

purity of its velvet whiteness. In the kitchen garden beside one of the gravel walks, little red pimpernels or shepherd's clock gaze up open-eyed at the sun in June. These are lovely and beloved ; but never can I forget the joy and pride of one day finding at the edge of the turnip plot a solitary plant of the azure-blue variety, *Anagallis cærulea*. The root was carefully marked with a stick, but never did it flower any more.

Weeds belonging to that part of the garden which once was cornfield should not perhaps be reckoned among true garden weeds. Yet one of them, at least, must not be left out. *Equisetum*, or mare's-tail, is possessed of rather a peculiar interest, if it be, as I am told, the only living British representative of the carboniferous period. No mention of this can I find in any of the usual garden books consulted, and others were too learned ; it is not named by Gerarde or by Parkinson, nor do others say a word. Often have I watched with interest our forests of *equisetum* growing through the hard-rolled gravel, or thronging narrow edges at the foot of a paling that divides us from the field. Of late these mimic mare's-tail forests are observed to have diminished, and to-day, at the end of May, the plant cannot be found at all. Last autumn we saw a patch of it

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

looking like a fairy larch forest, near a field path in the Highlands. The habitats of equisetum lie far apart indeed.

The common *Arum maculatum*, the "Lords and Ladies" of lanes and hedge-banks, is another protected weed in my garden, although by Paxton's dictum "it is a very disagreeable flower, and hence they are not favourites." The presence of it even in this garden of strict protection is often misunderstood, and at times its ruined leaves are seen in the weed-barrow. I think it to be one of the most native of our wild garden friends. Among its many country names are Silly loons (in Somerset) and Cuckoo pint. Cuckoo "quart" might well be named the great species that grows under olive-trees and in grassy places in the South of France, and whose giant spathe is like a grocer's cornucopia of tissue paper. Some of these, that I once brought home and planted in the garden apple-border waned away entirely after a few years, while plants of our smaller English species at about the same time became oftener seen. Arums do not get on very well, either wild or in the garden. Never have I beheld in the garden a single one of their scarlet fruit-spikes, while in the lanes and hedge-banks rarely does a single spathe escape the busy hands of passing

Weeds of the Garden

school children. Only last week I was admiring the splendid green and luxuriant growth of a great colony of arums under an old clay-built wall, when by came the parish hedger and cleared them all off, carefully leaving in safety a huge bed of stinging nettles.

An interesting little thing was—for, I think, it is now no more—a minute pale pink geranium which used to come in dry hot summers on the hard gravel walks. The height of it would be about half-an-inch, and the utmost spread of its foliage might almost cover a crown-piece. This mite has, I fear, yielded at last to the persistence of the garden roller.

Most lovely and most native among all the natural weeds of the garden of which I write are the wild white violets. Against these there is no law. In February and March the whole garden is white with them in every part, and in the grass at the north-east end and under the apple-trees you would almost think there had been a hailstorm, so white and thick the white violets lie. It is only violets and wood strawberries that are suffered to spread and multiply at will like this. Without question violets are native to the garden. It would seem that wild violets wander more than other weeds, or else they

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

sooner tire of a given place. Their numbers do not decrease, but many a fragrant patch remembered well in orchard grass or elsewhere about the garden has somehow disappeared, to be found again in some quite new locality. Wood strawberries were brought home "for remembrance," from the old grey walls of a little church in Hampshire about a quarter of a century ago. They seed now everywhere and are welcome; and they forget not the old church walls whence came their parent plant, and will climb joyfully all among the *Linaria cymbalaria*—or Mother of thousands, or Wandering sailor—to the top of our old brick ivied buttresses, six feet high and more. A little barren strawberry has been my pet for years. For many years it has lived close under the house wall, creeping up supported by wild ivy, looking very pretty, with an embroidery of humble little blossoms. And only lately have I learnt that it is no strawberry at all, but *Potentilla fragariastrum*.

And so we come to wild things who have made the garden their home, and yet who do not seem to have naturally sprung there; they have been brought by birds, or have come in a hundred ways.

Once, all over the kitchen garden, the thorn apple (*Datura stramonium*) ran wild.

Weeds of the Garden

It used to be too plentiful, though now quite lost. I remember how beautiful it was, with its large, pale-purple blossom, giving place in season to the prickly fruit, in its turn opening to scatter abroad its little black seeds. Gradually as years went on and care took the place of long neglect, it was weeded away off the face of the land, and now—I am sorry! They say *datura* was used in the incantations and unlawful practices of witches; also, no doubt, in some places thorn apple is as it is said to be—a remnant of old ecclesiastical gardening, although introduced from Constantinople, Spain, or Italy, nor earlier, I believe, than 1597.

Milk-thistle (*Carduus marianus*) is another departed weed from our garden, where it formerly used to flourish. This also, with its white-streaked leaves—made lovelier by a holier meaning that tradition gave—was once a favourite in convent gardens. Wherever it now is found, when not recently introduced, we may be sure its origin in that place is in some way ecclesiastical. Our milk-thistle has surely gone the way of *datura*, and it will be seen no more in the garden. These beautiful things are shy in their own way, seeming well to understand when they are not much wanted. Tansy,

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

with leafage "infinitely jagged and nicked and curled withal like feathers" (so described in Parkinson), has also, for reasons of its own, quitted the garden; and last June a patch of it, avoided by the cows, gave the sole touch of fresh green in all our dried-up meadow. The day of a school feast, a party of white-frocked little girls, sitting in the midst of this fresh and brilliant tansy—busy tying up aromatic posies of its emerald sprigs—made a picture to be remembered. On the east side of the house, close under the drawing-room windows, in a sort of *earth hem* six inches wide, suddenly appeared one summer a single plant of *Claytonia perfoliata*, holding a flower-head upright—in the middle of its strange little green saucer. Immediately it became a favourite weed. We have had difficulties in the matter of keeping it alive. There was an under-gardener who persisted in mowing it down. It did no harm in the position it had chosen; strict orders had been given not to meddle with the little plant; yet whenever this unlucky youth's turn came to tidy up, the *Claytonia* was sure to be annihilated. Once I hurried to stand guard over my weed as "Baggs," looking dangerous, came near, and again forbade him to touch it. Yet next morning it was

Weeds of the Garden

cut as usual. Nothing will cure an unskilled garden-labourer's ardour for destroying the wrong thing. "Baggs" has long been a thing of the past, and *Claytonia perfoliata* now lives and multiplies in peace.

Close under an aged apple espalier for several years past has flourished a splendid root of wild wood hyacinth. Somehow, although constantly increasing in size and in depth of colour, it has never lost the thin spare character of a true wild flower. Once on a time there came a plant of twayblade. Dog violets flower here and there like little amethyst gems, and a new variety, very pale in hue, has appeared. In the month of May, wild hyacinth—blue and white and pink—adopts the garden for its own. In May, too, woodruffe makes sweet the air in different parts of the garden. These last, however, are weeds imported at some period from elsewhere.

Late in June one becomes aware of the slender, eager springing of *avens* wherever there is shade of shrubs or trees. I like to see it, in moderation, and it suits well its pretty names of "goldstar" and "erba benedetta," though certainly not unlike a tall, mistaken buttercup. With small petals and bunch of brown central stamens it makes but little show.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Then there are what may be called national weeds—weedy plants which are mostly too inherent and native to the soil of every English garden. Of these are the hateful Summer cress; and Shepherd's purse, with its little heart-shaped satchels, so neat and tidy-looking in its habit; and Enchanter's nightshade, which for all its magic name, is a pest, and would fain, if we let it, annex the garden altogether; and pink-flowered willow-weed, which we should make much of were it only rare; and coltsfoot, which I love. And in the garden orchard, as indeed, wherever deep meadow grass is growing, all over the country in the springtime of the year, come those dear favourites of childhood, the innocent cuckoo-flowers, or Lady's smock. Mistletoe has always been a lover of this garden. The double lines of old branching limes are tufted with it. Our old apple-trees are green with mistletoe in winter; and lately young seedlings are seen creeping up the stem of at least one young apple-tree. I do not see that any harm is done; and how weirdly beautiful at Christmastide is its dark green foliage set with pearls! Besides these and many more a host of indistinguishable green things, which I suppose have names.

And then the grasses! As a matter of

Weeds of the Garden

fact, one species alone belongs to the garden. Bashaw-grass, the name by which I have always known it, is conspicuous for its style and stature. The real name, I suppose, is Brome-grass, or barren brome-grass. The other name must have been at some time gained by its commanding height and appearance; for the bashaw of dictionary is "a tyrant; a proud, imperious person." Yet, notwithstanding its flaunting title, the whole growth of this grass is instinct with perfect grace. There could hardly be a better proof of true taste in a gardener than that given last summer, when a large tuft of bashaw-grass was left on the edge of a shrubbery tangle, just where yew and wild ivy meet the lawn. All through autumn and winter, the yellowing *awns* and sprays contrasted well with the dark evergreen background. A few common grasses crest some of our old walls, mingling with yellow wallflower; but they spring and fade, and come and go with the changing year, and we seem to take no heed of them. All over the lawns come, too easily and too many, unsightly plantains, and with them, sometimes, lovely dark patches of very lowly thyme. Daisies in their multitudes, of course, are continually snubbed. Their name is never heard or alluded to; but in the secret heart of me, I

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

love them ! I would have my lawn all white with daisies (if only at the same time the turf remained short and velvety!). To every heart is dear the crimson edges of the little simple flower ; for who can forget Tennyson's maiden whose footstep left the daisies rosy, or Wordsworth's daisy, that "protects the lingering dewdrop from the sun" ?

What happy thanks we owe to poets who have crystallised for us in undying verse our vague throbs of Nature-love !

I can think of no more garden weeds, either pets or enemies, native or imported, unless the various agarics that autumn brings may be so called. They come in shadowy places under trees or in the shrubberies. To me they are full of interest in their quiet way, endless in variety, and some of them marvellously made. We cannot boast any grandly-coloured scarlet and orange species, but in their own varied shades of brown or lilac the beauty of our autumn toadstools cannot be surpassed.

One, like a large dark brown or chocolate mushroom, was found four years ago between the roots of a great oak in a meadow near the garden fence. This curious growth seemed something of a mystery, and was despatched to me by post the day my gardener discovered it.

Weeds of the Garden

It was then, and still remains, as hard as a bit of mahogany. It is as if the spirit of the oak and his substance had passed into the lowly fungus at his feet. One might almost fancy some kind of occult affinity, in the broad mushroom-like shape of the old oak of four or five centuries from which it sprang. It is said of the various kinds of *fungus arboreus* that they have a venomous faculty; and they of the oak bring death.

Before altogether taking leave of weeds, a word must be said about one of the prettiest and most remarkable—although not English. *Oxalis cernuus* is especially a garden weed, for it is not seen in waste-ground. During February and March, Riviera hotel and villa gardens are gay with its bright yellow flower. It covers the garden-beds persistently to the discomfiture of gardeners, and the sown grass is often full of it. Yet it never seeds. Its manner of propagation is kept to itself, and remains an impenetrable mystery, impossible to unravel. Within the last twenty-five years the coasts of Southern France and Italy have been overrun, and it has now crossed the sea and made itself at home in Sicily. Experiments have been made, and the fact appears established that *Oxalis cernuus* does not ripen seed in Europe, neither are the insects, bees, &c., necessary

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

for its propagation found in Europe. Yet the increase is so enormous that in at least one garden known to me, eight men were employed daily in digging it up; and still it was not got rid of! This oxalis is a native of the Cape, and it is common in the island of Teneriffe. The yellow colour of it is peculiarly fresh and beautiful, and the foot-stalk not seldom rises from nine to eleven inches in height, so full of life and vigour is the plant. It is remarked to be very particular about closing by four o'clock in the afternoon.

It might certainly seem that the English garden where we have wandered is but "a dankish untoyled place," as old garden books would say, after this long enumeration of its weeds and fungi. Yet I think it is not so badly kept after all. It might even be a surprise to find there more flowers than weeds!

XI

*The Human Interest of a
Garden*



*Fancy's pictures, whose being is within the
mind, where our gardens are all our own.*



XI

The Human Interest of a Garden

ALMOST the best praise, perhaps, that a garden may claim is said in six words. Some one the other day, alluding to a very lovely garden, said, "It has such a human interest."

This "human interest," so far as one understands the meaning of the phrase, is wanting in many of the finest gardens. It is a quality that always most strongly attracts, although not every one is able to define it. It is not easy to express, and may be better described by what it is not. This "human interest" is vainly sought in gardens where thousands of begonias or geraniums—brilliant but soulless—are grown under glass and bedded out early in the summer. Little pleasure is there in plants put out to make a summer show, and after their day is done, dug up, and thrown on the rubbish heap or burnt. The system is heartless, though sometimes perhaps necessary.

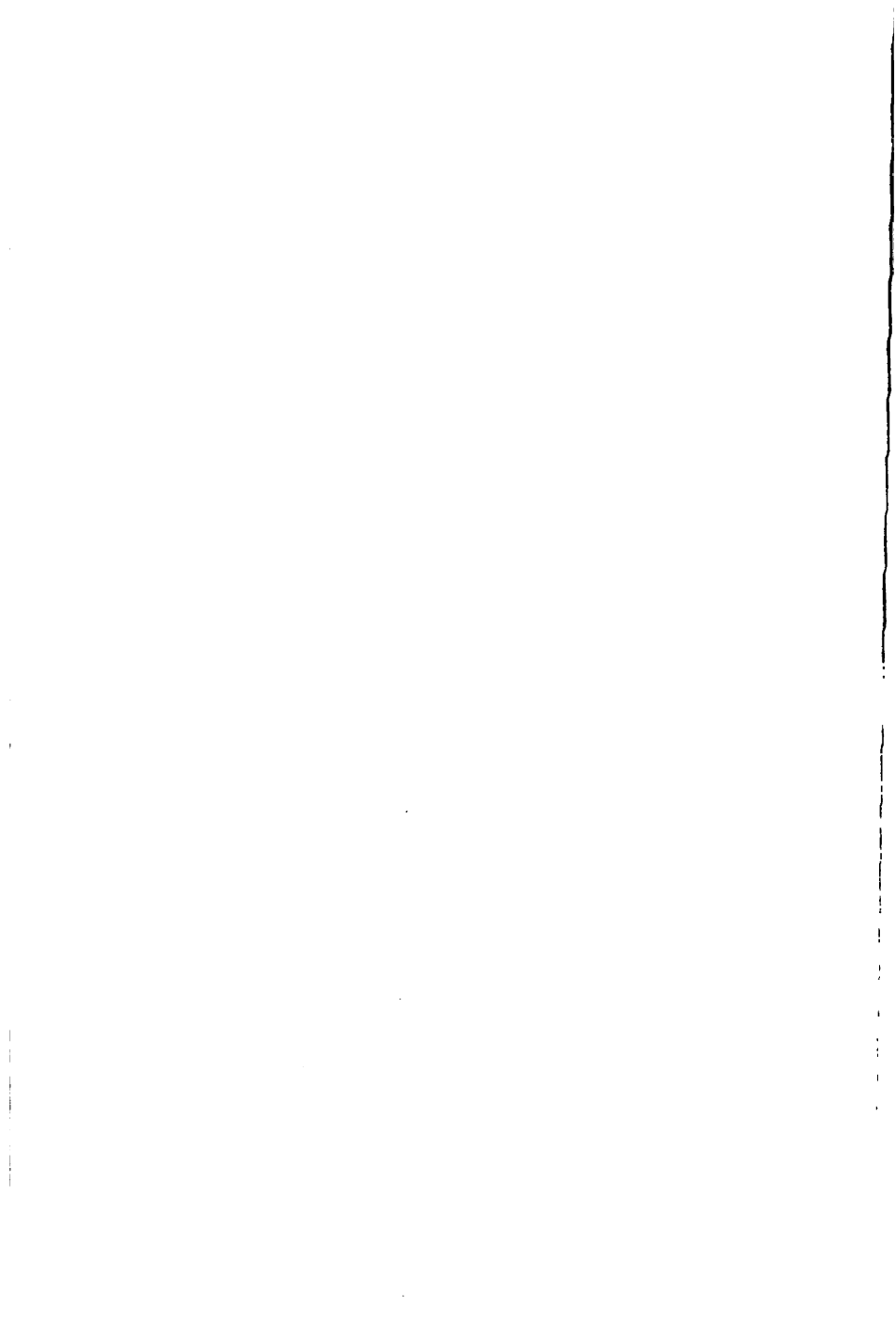
The Peacock's Pleasaunce

These, indeed, will make a good colour-show for the time, but how dull, how scentless! The place to which belong faultlessly kept gravel walks between shrubberies of clipped rhododendron—ingeniously shaped beds cut out on lawns—tall tree-roses standing in plates on the grass, cheap, ill-designed vases, and many another well-kept dulness—are all things without “human interest.”

Let us turn away from them, and look at the pictures that garden-love may from time to time have graven on the heart. Call back the remembrance of sweet flower-closes you have seen, it may be long ago, or that you may hope still at times to enjoy the happiness of seeing. I do not think you will with any real pleasure look back on very many formal gardens made up of bedding out, or even of the best “carpet bedding.” But you will remember with loving enjoyment some dream of a place, with quiet lawns and perennial borders, and surprises of bosky corners and trimmed yews; with spaces of wild woodland trees, looking out perhaps upon some sunlit field or vista of blue distance. I think the epithet taken for my “text” may partly mean that everywhere about such gardens as these one can feel the master’s hand, though the gardener’s may in reality have done the whole of the work. In such gardens there



IN LOVE



Human Interest of a Garden

is no sameness of any kind; no hateful edgings of yellow-leaved pyrethrum, no hint of a red garden, or a yellow, or a white one, or any other of the fashionable singularities of the day. Masses there will often be of crimson antirrhinum, or double white stock or purple iris, or of any other loveliness wherever the right spot seems indicated. Almost every plant in such a garden will be individually cared for, tied up and supported if weak, and the strong suffered to spread abroad in their beauty, and encroaching weeds kept far away.

The whole place is joy, not show. One such garden I have known, nay, four or five. Gardens both large and small; size is no matter. All are beautiful because all are full of charm. As "the last taste of sweet is sweetest last," so the latest garden (a garden in Scotland), with plan of the kind we are meaning, stands out clearest in remembrance. . . . There is a broad turf walk, which, passing through an opening in a finely grown yew hedge, is lost beyond in sunny lawns and the darkness of overshadowing old yew-trees of age unknown; for a yew may live, they say, a thousand years. In the midst is a fountain, half hidden in its own diamond spray. Beyond the yew-tree shadows the green walk resumes through a

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

second hedge and ends abruptly in a stone seat under a grey, lichened wall. At the back of the stone seat is trained a cherry-tree, who in his season bears red luscious cherries worthy to serve on golden salvers for kings' tables. But it is not with the red cherries lies the chief joy of the long turf walk. It lies in the broad patterned band of heart's-ease on either side, each length a mosaic of richly varied colour. The purples and deep blues and browns, and the yellows of every shade of gold, and violas of purest white (well-named "purity"). It is rather hard to tell which is heart's-ease or which pansy and which viola, they are so much alike, and of late years have been so intermixed. And this splendid feast of heart's-ease will go on growing in perfection of beauty all through the long summer months—it is a long delight, however, which no garden may expect to attain south of the Tweed. The haunting vision of that gold and violet flower-mosaic reminds me of an eccentric heart's-ease appearing last April in my own English garden, a place where not so much the tidy keeping, or wealth of summer bloom delights—as the strange little vagaries, the whims and caprices that come now and again among its inhabitants.

These are scarcely known to any but the

Human Interest of a Garden

garden and myself; yet they are a continual pleasure, and somehow the more observed the oftener they seem to crop up here and there about the garden. Such things as poppies and daisies, and crimson snapdragons changing to seed along the top of an old brick wall, may look natural enough. They seem to belong there; "flowers in the crannied wall." An extremely fine seedling heart's-ease, growing on the *face* of the wall is another thing, however. And this is how we discovered it.

One morning the garden seemed more full than ever of deep silence; for, although far on in the month of April, no April showers as yet had blessed the earth, and no birds sang; the morning was gloomy and far too windy and bitterly cold for song. As I was pacing up and down a grass path outside the high garden walls facing west, where was found some slight shelter, memory went back to the more genial springtimes of other years, and sadly one felt the contrast. And then a strange thing happened! Suddenly a little smiling face shone out to us from the old bricks just one step away! Out of the bare wall at about a foot from the ground a beautiful, large heart's-ease looked full at us from a niche between two bricks. The flower was as fine as could be seen anywhere.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

Broad purple petals, deeply bordered round in creamy white, the whole plant strong and healthy, carrying leaf and flower and one impatient bud all ready to open. How possibly could a plant like this have filtered through the thickness of the wall from its sisters on the other side—for on the other side is the border of pansies—or if not how could the seed have been carried over by bird or wind, and sown with such precision in the tiny crevice where it grew and prospered? Many are the mysteries a garden holds. Scarce a day during the next month passed, that I did not visit my little friend; watched it till the round comely petals began to lean over, and the flower bent itself down and gave room for an exultant bud at its side in due time to open out and take its place.

Amongst these curious whims and caprices one of the strangest takes the form of a sort of Bottle Imp. In the kitchen courtyard of one of the great houses in Cheshire, a narrow flower-border, time out of mind, had been decorated with rows of empty bottles of singular shape, planted in the earth neck downwards. The lady of the hall heard or read something about ferns found in these planted bottles, so often seen in old cottage gardens in that country. So she had some of them pulled up. The necks were found

Human Interest of a Garden

to be full of ferns; living ferns of emerald green.

One of these bottles was sent for me to examine. The tiny ferns were of most delicate growth, and they completely filled up the neck of the bottle. The glass bottle itself is of a kind that was in use,—meant probably to hold spirits,—about seventy years ago or more, but which is now no longer made. The most curious thing is, that on good authority it is said ferns now quite unknown in those parts of England where little ferneries of the kind survive, are found within them—as well as other ferns which still are well known and common. Moreover, it is said that within the space of twelve months any glass bottle whatever, planted in the earth neck downwards, will also become filled with ferns. I have not heard whether the truth of this has as yet been tested. One more “light turn of fancy” among garden flowers must be told, though it had a sad ending.

In a garden I knew, there was an old hedge of *Cotoneaster Simonii* over five or six feet high, and over a hundred yards in length, following up alongside a rather steep walk to the top of the garden, where it ends abruptly at a sundial and cross walk. Just here at the end of the hedge a rose had

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

chosen to ensconce herself midway among the tangle ; for several years the hermit rose dwelt apart, secretly, and safe from harm ; ever growing taller and stronger. I know not if any save myself, who from time to time had watched her progress, knew of her existence ; least of all did the gardener know. At last the hour came. One late June morning I was in the garden, and on reaching the upper end of the hedge, suddenly was aware of a new loveliness shining among the old, dark, Cotoneaster leaves. The rose had uplifted herself above the level of the hedge, and there she was, blooming in perfect beauty, enthroned upon its rugged age in the joy of her own sweet triumph. I cannot tell what variety of rose, and it matters not ; the flower was there, in colour like as one dreams of a Rose. Something about it reminded me of the old-fashioned, long-neglected cabbage rose ; bright and glowing, breathing around a breath of purest incense. I gazed at the vision a little time, reflecting on how the long, brave upward struggle of the rose had been finished at last, crowned with complete success.

That evening some friends came with us into the garden. They came especially to see the rose, but they never saw it ; for alas ! when we arrived there, it was gone. The

Human Interest of a Garden

gardener had been there with his cruel shears : amongst the clippings and rubbish was just a shred or so of rose-pink and fresh green—that was all. 'The whole of my poor rose had been grubbed. It was for ever lost and every remnant cleared away. . . .

I am afraid I almost hated that gardener after that.

From such a ruthless scene, it is heart-felt satisfaction, turning to the rich bloom and happy irregularity of another garden I know ; also, a garden in June. For the first moment, as one opens the gate to enter, the flash and flare of a legion of great Oriental poppies fairly dazzles with scarlet brilliancy. Like George Herbert's rose, it "bids the rash gazer wipe his eyes." They grow along a border in the middle of the garden. The effect of all this glare of living scarlet is nothing less than splendid. And then all along one side of the garden there is the pure freshness and charm of white and pink foxglove, self-sown, almost wild. The garden walls at the back of the foxgloves belong of right to a few old apple and plum trees, which make a leafy background for the richly-coloured flowers, they are far too old to mind. These foxgloves shoot up in pink or snowy spires, some of them six feet high. They seed year after year, growing

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of their own wild will, and there's none to say them nay. It is indeed a long array of beauty! Like a fair company of lovely damsels, straight and tall, marching together up the garden.

But I think I am tired of so much garden talk. The world, too, tires of it. Let us shut the garden gate and stray out into the pleasant fields. . . .

XII

Art Education

I



*What is Art? And which are they that
will know the soul of her?*



XII

Art Education

I *

MORE than seven hundred years ago a little company of thirteen monks separated themselves from the Benedictine convent of St. Mary, in the north of England, in order to join the Cistercian rule, whose discipline was more severe and whose reputed sanctity greater. Thurstan, Archbishop of York, himself leaning towards the Cistercians, encouraged these men in their ascetic aspirations. He absolved them from their vows; and on a day of midwinter, in 1132, they went forth for ever from the house where life had become too smooth and easy for their souls' health. A portion of wild and desolate land was given to them, in the narrow valley of the Skell, along which the river rushes, clear and strong. Here the monks found a great elm and a grove of

* An Address read before a Somerset School of Art (since entitled "School of Science and Art"), November 20, 1870.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

seven yew-trees, and here, as tradition tells, they abode for days and weeks and months, even for the space of two years. Through those long winters they had no other shelter. They drank of the quick-running Skell; and for food they caught the fish that swam in its waters, and gathered the roots and herbs that grew near its banks. At night they knelt upon the ground to pray. They wrapped their coarse monks' garments about them, and lay down in peace to sleep under the trees. The thick branches spread between them and the stars. Through frost and snow, amid driving rain and biting winds, they sought no other roof. Hunger and cold they suffered, but they swerved not from their purpose; their faith and their endurance failed not; whilst, day by day, in deep solitude and meditation, they read in the book that ever lay spread open before them. The forest fretwork of branches overhead, and the tapestry of autumn leaves under their feet, the music of the winds of heaven, and tender harmonies of opal fires that pass across the sky at moonrise, the golden and the scarlet clouds that wait about the rising and the setting sun, with all the strange poetry of Nature, grew into their souls. And ever before them rose a glorious vision of a holy place, a temple

Art Education

to the living God, which they should build up, there, on the margin of the swift river.

Doubt not but that they saw it stand. When evening fell, and in the pale morning mist—yea, even when the sun arose in his strength, in prophetic dream they saw its mighty shadow, lying broad and black between the rocks. And well can I believe that though in their flesh they might not behold the day of its finished greatness, yet in spirit those poor monks paced the arched cloisters and long pillared aisles; while, oft-times, in their ears they heard low chauntings of unearthly sweetness. And so they waited in patience and in hope, in sore need likewise, till the winter of their exile passed into spring, a spring of new life and power. For after two years were ended, the good St. Bernard, touched by the story of their steadfastness, sent them messengers with help, and they began to build. They quarried the rocks of their valley; they spared not themselves in toil. And as no hardships had dulled their ardour, so neither difficulty nor danger daunted them; but through all their lives they laboured. And when they fell asleep, the work was continued after them by other hands. Thus, stone by stone, was raised up one of the most magnificent of those great churches which in past days

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of piety and enthusiasm ever more and more enriched our country, to the praise and glory of God.

In Skelldale to this day there stand two ruins, witnesses connected with the old tradition of those thirteen monks. One, a yew-tree of immense size, sole survivor of the Seven Sisters (so the group of trees was named by the country people). Hollow the ancient trunk is, yet vigorous still. Its boughs heavy with dark masses of foliage, and bearing year after year its accustomed ornament of scarlet fruit. The other is the tower and noble remnant of a church and abbey. Grand in the profound silence and stillness of its utter decay, the building, though not so old by centuries, is a ruin yet more complete; it is more truly nothing but the broken outline of itself than even that hollow yew-tree, with "its thousand years of gloom." Enough remains, however, of Fountain's Abbey for us to know somewhat of its former beauty and state. Enough, after Time—with human ignorance and stupidity, yet more fatal than Time itself—had done its worst. Delicate interlacing arches and slender shafts may still be seen there. Sculptured capitals, set now in the green grass, instead of crowning, as once they did, fair pillars of stone or granite. Lofty,

Art Education

arched windows, and great piers and buttresses of massy strength ; enough remains to teach us many a lesson in architecture, although the men who gave vitality to those once ordered stones were untrained, if not unlearned men. The master builders simply and earnestly worked out that which they knew and felt, not considering which style of architecture they should choose, for they knew but one. Each workman, free to follow the teaching of his own fancy, carved his capitals and corbels of his arches with transcripts of the wild flowers and forest leaves that grew around him. The thing came naturally to him, and it was done with a fire and truth to which, alas ! we in these cold modern times can hardly attain. And thus, with a generous binding together of workmanship, both rude and finished, but all of it the best that each man could give, a church was built whose very ruins are studied by us with reverence and wonder. In the times to which we are now looking back, Art and Religion went hand in hand, so that one can scarcely be spoken of apart from the other.

There lived in Italy, about the first half of the fourteenth century, a holy man whose story, I think, is familiar to all. I mean that painter-monk, whose whole existence was one

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

great devotion to his Art and, through Art, to God. A man whose life from earliest youth was stainless to the end ; who went in and shut the door of his cell, and, kneeling upon his knees, with prayer and fasting prepared himself before ever he began to paint a picture. An artist who believed each line he drew was heaven-inspired ; who painted saints and angels with the immortal bloom and the pure joy of Paradise glowing in divinest beauty upon their faces, their garments of azure and purple shaped in folds of heavenly grace, as they danced amid the roses and the palms of Eden. Colour was to him an exquisite delight, almost a religion ; and only by jewelled backgrounds of purest gold could he strive to glorify his visions of the just, with a faint conception of the marvellous light of God. Fra Angelico, whose work indeed was priceless, never received money for his labour. His custom was humbly to take from the prior of his convent the brethren's orders for whatever sacred picture they desired. So that at last every cell became a shrine for some holy subject, traced by his hand upon the wall, an offering to his Divine Master. That cloister of St. Mark at Florence is thrown open now ; you can go where you please through its long corridors and galleries ; you may look from the window

Art Education

of the great empty library, through a green veil of vine leaves into the sunny court, with its marble well, its artichokes, and lavender and orange trees. All pretty much now as it was then. And you may peer into the empty cells, neatly white-washed and quite empty, save for the precious square foot or two of fresco that remains in each one on the wall, close beside the tiny casement, just where the inmate of the cell could see it from his pillow when morning broke. When I was there in the year 1867, the monks were all dispersed, except five or six, who haunted still the passages and cloisters. One of them, a feeble old man of eighty, would tell one, "I have lived here for fifty years; if they sent me away now, whither should I go?"

The stories of the builders of Fountain's Abbey and of the monk of Fiesole, amongst many others, have occurred to me specially to show the wide difference between the spirit of Art in mediæval times and in our own day. Names of genius and of power far surpassing theirs might have been brought before you. Other men of old time there were; great workers whose histories are familiar to us from our youth. Names such as Albert Dürer, the goldsmith's son of Nuremberg, and his fellow-citizen Adam Kraft,

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

the mason, in whose hands hard stone became as wreaths of living leaves and flowers ; Leonardo da Vinci, whose genius was so catholic that in literature, music, engineering and geometrical science he excelled as greatly as in "the dumb poetry of art," and who was the first to establish a school of design in his own country. Leonardo's contemporary, Filipepi (called Sandro Botticelli), whose art had its own quiet but unmistakable influence. The catalogue of names might be endless. From remote ages of antiquity have come down to us works, such as those which in their decay remain still beautiful on the shores of Greece, or such as the Pont de Gard in the south of France ; models of strength, of beauty joined with perfect fitness for their purpose. Illustrations present themselves without number to prove that, on the Continent as in England, Art was once, so to speak, *spontaneous*.

I believe that all truth, whether of painting or sculpture, demands a certain single-mindedness and childlike character (very hard to find, alas ! in the nineteenth century), joined with an intense, though perhaps unconscious, love of Nature. In the Middle Ages they had time, which we have not. There was then no straining after Art. The old builders of cathedrals, palaces, and towns,

Art Education

in simplicity and faith laboured to render the thoughts that were in them. As has been remarked of the writings of one of our great poets, so we may say of mediæval Art; it was not so much a particular faculty as the general result of vigorous and enthusiastic minds expressing themselves in that way. They knew not, and they cared not, if any before them had done the like; only they strained each nerve, and set their faces to the work, until every obstacle was overcome. Even so we may read in the dreary old Moldavian legend, of how the marble tower, having been overthrown nine times by untoward spirits of the air, at last stood, strong and beautiful. The builders won, because with joy they gave their hearts' blood in the contest; because they obeyed the awful vision which bade them build up a human life within the wall. Thought and power of expression arising thus without effort, spontaneously, academies of art and schools of design were unlike, unneeded and unknown. They were as little needed in Europe then as now in the East. Culture and civilisation would seem to have created a necessity, unfelt in the lands of the sun—Persia, India, China—nations where all things have always been the same for thousands of years; where in design, arrangement of colour, and surpass-

The Peacock's Pleasance

ing delicacy of workmanship, there is nothing to be learnt. No teaching could improve the shape of a common Hindoo drinking-cup, or brass lotah, for example; nor the intricate fancy of the patterns in black and red, daily painted on wooden boxes by ignorant Burmese, sitting on the ground at the doors of their hovels. Half-starved natives from the hills can fashion, with their own untaught instinctive grace, European gold and silver coins into bracelets and brooches; years of learning at South Kensington could never cause the weaving of one shade of more harmonious tint in the threads of a Persian carpet, nor suggest one whit more richly perfect design in the looms of Cashmere, or the gold embroideries of Delhi. A life's education could in nowise better the ivory carvings, the brilliant bird and butterfly portrayings of the Chinese, nor the fine grotesque of their porcelain monsters. It is the same with all those Eastern nations, who have not known progress; in a less degree, also, of out-of-the-way European peoples. But with us it is otherwise.

The decline of Art, which began about the period of the Reformation, and the difficulties we must struggle with in feeling after its true spirit, are partly, perhaps, the price to be paid for our enormous advance in

Art Education

Science. Religious enthusiasm, although it went for much, can hardly have been the sole moving spirit of Art in past times. You have but to pass along the street of almost any country town or village in England—here in Somersetshire, for instance, in this town of Frome—and look up at the many old houses that remain, to feel that good design must once have come naturally to us. These gabled houses were doubtless built by the common masons of the place; yet how quaintly pleasant are they to look upon! In many places they are really beautiful, with ornamental timbers, carved stone doorways, mullioned windows, groups of twisted chimneys, and always the characteristic high-pitched roof. Far down in country lanes and fields, throughout the length and breadth of England, old cottages are scattered here and there, whose picturesqueness seems to prove how easy a thing cottage architecture used to be. Nowadays I believe it is found less hard to design a palace! Many a choice bit of what we call true English scenery must at this moment be present to your mind. You must have been often charmed by the steep moss-grown thatch of an old cottage at some corner of a sunny common, or at some turn of a green lane, overhung by tall elm-trees, or nighed in its own small wilderness

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of old-fashioned cabbage-roses and white lilies—a thing always to be remembered with pleasure.

It was, I believe, only within these last twenty years or so, that people seemed to find out how exceedingly ugly most of their modern things were. Everything in which there was design at all was badly designed. Mr. Ruskin had already begun to write wonderful books, full of thoughts upon Art, which were new to everybody; and to rouse people up to a sense of the ugliness surrounding them. There was also, as we all know, another influence at work, never unfelt, though at the time almost unacknowledged. That was the influence of the Prince Consort.

And so at last, our eyes being opened, we began to amend our ways. Schools of Art were established one by one throughout the Kingdom. The first were founded in 1842; two in London and York; three in the three great centres of manufactural industry—Birmingham, Manchester, and Spitalfields. Since that date the number of schools has gradually increased to 107, in which during the past year 19,864 students had received instruction. Our own school of Art at Frome holds no unworthy place in the yearly Government reports: a better place indeed than

Art Education

that of most other towns of the same size. I have no fears now that it will not well maintain its position, and go on increasing in honour and success. Art education is deemed by the Government of the country of such deep importance that all possible encouragement is held out. Large sums of money are annually expended in aids of all kinds, last year exceeding £49,000. Night classes have increased in four years from 32 to 249, giving instruction in drawing to 9322 pupils. The elementary schools for children of the poor are a peculiarly interesting feature of the movement. In them the good that must be worked by the refining power of study in this direction cannot be over-rated. These last-named schools increase most rapidly, and during the past year more than 120,000 poor children have been taught drawing.

The advantages of local schools of Art are clear; a mason or a carpenter who can draw rises to the rank of a carver in stone or wood. The workman learns something of design, which enables him to get higher wages. In every successful school such instances are most frequent. And not merely firmness of touch and ability in drawing freely and correctly, or accuracy in joining and moulding, are to be obtained. The

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

chief aim must always be what has been called "the freedom of the workman"; and this, by education of the eye, in teaching it to see (seeing justly, being in truth an acquirement); of the hand, in training it to copy form of every kind; of the mind, in learning to observe and to know good from evil in Art. Thus, after long and persevering toil, is gained that power to invent beautiful combinations of form and colour known as applied design.

It is the happy gift of design, thus painfully obtained, that I feel sure—be it never so low in degree—must light up the workman's life with a new brightness. It is, I believe, as the delight of an added sense; for no day can be wholly colourless that has been marked by some interest of invention.

When the first rules of perspective and the principles of light and shade and reflection have been mastered, and the student begins to draw from Nature, he will find how endless are the suggestions he receives from her. From studies in all manner of plants and flowers; from observation of the growth of trees; in the careful following with pencil or brush of the lovely forms of trailing ivies and bending grasses; in studying the outlines of mantling hedge-

Art Education

plants,—which in summer need no seeking, so abundantly do they spring about our path,—these suggestions that arise continually will be to him invaluable.

And here I may remark how these wild field-growths are more useful to the student than is the greater luxuriance of cultivated ground. There is in them more individuality, more feeling, if one may say so; less fully rounded they may be, but their very meagreness is full of character. Just as a tree that has space to spread its branches evenly all round in a sheltered spot is good as a type of tree-beauty, yet is not so delightful to paint as one that has had to struggle for life on a bleak hill-side. As sometimes one sees the bole of a beech-tree run up branchless to a great height, polished smooth and silvery white with the rough winds' constant buffeting; or as an oak, rugged and stag-headed,—its gnarled trunk may be all aslant,—yet bearing, somehow, that look of the main root working right down all the deeper into the earth, from the winter storms that have raged about its head. Look at the veining of a wild ivy-leaf, and see how far more distinctly marked and rich in colour it is than is the dark, uniform green of the same leaf when grown in a garden. Look at the delicate cutting out

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

of the scarlet-tinted leaves of crane's-foot or wild geranium. And again, the wild strawberry; that little plant as it creeps over dry banks and diapers the ground under the trees in almost every coppice and nutty woodland hollow, is about the sweetest of all for suggestion of design; with leaf and flower and fruit all in season together. Then for colour: there is more to be gained in a winter's walk between the hedgerows of any of our Somersetshire lanes than they who have not eyes to see could well believe. Many a lesson in colour you may find in the old bare hedges, with their soft shades of grey and brown, their purple bramble-sprays, and here and there a dash of gold, where some autumn leaf, forgotten by the winds, still quivers on its stalk—more to be learnt here, I think, than in the best-kept pleasure-ground.

And to the classes who do not work for their bread the school of Art renders no less service. Those students who have much talent for drawing are set in the right direction, and those who have little are taught to make the most of it. While the habit of observation, gained by copying natural objects, creates or fosters that sympathy with and that love of Nature which is, without doubt, the healthiest and most enduring of

Art Education

all enjoyments,—giving a charm that nothing else can give, to country life—for

“Nothing is lost to one that sees
With the eye that feeling gave;
To him there's a story in every breeze,
And a picture in every wave.”

No one who has ever made a careful drawing from Nature of flower or leaf, or lines of wood and hill, can fail afterwards to find how the effort has enabled him to enjoy tenfold the beauty of all other leaves and flowers and wooded hills.

One other claim on our sympathies may be mentioned, as noted in these words in a former report of the Committee of Council on Education. “Containing, as does the School of Design, students of all ranks and classes, without separation or exclusiveness, and giving to all the same real and severe instruction, I believe it is producing a good result, far wider in its effects than the mere tuition it imparts.”

Already an abundant harvest has been reaped from these schools, apart from those other nobler fruits whose growth is less obvious, and their ripening slower; some there are which, as being supposed to come within a woman's comprehension, I may be allowed to indicate here. Such, for example, as the improved taste in jewellery and orna-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

ments of gold and silver-work ; the excellence of patterns and shades of colour of the silks and satins and ribbons now woven for our personal adorning ; and the chintzes, wall-papers, muslin curtains, carpets, china, and such-like things wherewith we adorn our rooms. If we recall for a moment the image of certain melancholy mahogany sideboards, of sad-coloured moreen curtains, of the paper-hangings covered with dull meaningless scrolls, that we all at one time lived with so contentedly, and compare them with the rich variety of well-designed furniture now in common use, the change a few years have made will be apparent. Indeed, so many hitherto unthought-of forms of natural objects are now made use of, that there is some danger lest we tire altogether of them. I am afraid ferns, swallows, stars, humming-birds, peacocks' feathers, shells, and countless other beautiful things are becoming almost wearisome by their continual repetition in ornamental design. If we turn to our gardens, there also the school of Art has indirectly been at work. You may trace it in the massing of colours and in their harmonious arrangement, in the contrasting of flowers of dazzling brilliance with sober-hued or dead-white leaves. The idea of what in former days used to be known as

Art Education

“an English garden,” that dimly-remembered maze of winding walks and shaded turf and borders of tangled sweetness, is almost lost (as most gardeners think it should be!) in the modern parterre. A garden is, in these days, little more than a mosaic of splendid colours laid in settings of browns and reds.

So true is it that a really powerful influence, of whatever kind, is perceived not only in that which is immediately connected with itself, but grows and spreads from the centre in ever-widening circles, as concentric rings are seen to overspread the surface when a stone is thrown into a pool of water.

I must not longer take up your time with these thoughts. I offer them in all humility, knowing them to be somewhat crude and unfinished.



Art Education

II



Art Education

II*

IT is a long interval since November 1870, twenty-nine years ago almost to a day, when I last met this School of Art. The interval has been full of inevitable change—of changes in all directions. A small number belonging to those days are met once more on this similar occasion. They will not forget how, on that evening so many years ago, there were present with us some who are now away—friends and noble characters whose absence makes life poorer for us. We that remain do not fail to recognise how difficult it is to keep pace with the times. Twenty-nine or thirty years give ample time for the old order of things to pass and for new to take their place; and the changes, as you know, on every side are larger and more far-spreading than perhaps we could then have imagined possible. To glance back in one direction

* An Address read before the same Somerset School of Science and Art, November 30, 1899.

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

only—in 1870 it had hardly begun to be thought at all right that women should let their voice be heard in public,—or perhaps only just for a word or two. So well understood was this at the time, that I recollect it was considered incorrect for me on the evening in question to read myself, the address I had prepared. It had to be read aloud for me. There's a strong contrast between then and now, and we women are not any longer careful to keep silence. . . . Thirty years ago a women's congress, or bicycles, or a thousand social changes which have so much increased the independence and amusements of our lives were as yet undreamed. Everywhere things go on faster and faster, and these closing years of the century (1899) are charged with a sense of fulness and strange unrest and hurry.

Little need is there for allusion to the century's latest terrible development—the crash of War; for the engrossing thought to every one of us is, I believe, “the War”; so much so as to make it well-nigh impossible to give individual attention to any other theme.

The subject of Art, however, amongst a crowd of other subjects that fill the mind, has to be faced. It is a theme so immense, in its way so vast, that to deal with only a

Art Education

little bit of it seems a serious undertaking. And first let me ask the Science students present to believe that if I do not allude to their special department, it is simply because I am more ignorant of Science than of modern Art. Science and Art are sisters, with the difference that while the world might get on, however wearily, without the Fine Arts, without Science we should be nowhere. Where Science is subservient to Art, there is an indispensable connection between the two. I have read that the sculptor still finds it necessary to attend most accurately to chemical details in the composition of his bronze; and we know that the painter and the photographer supplement each other's work. More than this I dare not hazard, for fear of getting out of my depth as a sciolist. If change during the past years has so strongly affected our daily life, what shall be said of the advance in Art? The difference between painting as it is practised now, and as it was a generation back, between the new methods and the old, is so wide, so marked, that we of the older time hardly know where we are. We have lost touch with it. When I attempt to understand modern pictures, as a rule—I don't. It has been stated lately as a fact, that a three-volume novel can be composed and printed

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

in the space of three weeks ; and, I believe, in the latest style of portrait-painting that a portrait can be taken from life and finished in two sittings. Under conditions such as these, how can it be within our powers to keep in touch with any of the Arts? We feel out of the running. Thus it would have been a relief could I have asked and obtained your permission to stay away and to say nothing at all about Art to-night. Since, however, this may not be, I promise to shorten, all I can, a few necessary remarks.

There is no question but that a very long step has been taken in the technical part of painting. Where formerly the many difficulties of that kind seemed often to be almost insuperable, it is to-day, for the most part, a comparatively easy task to learn to draw with sufficient correctness. So smooth, indeed, is now the path to success in this, that I think it is too often half-forgotten that painting is, in reality, the hardest thing in the world. It was said by one of our first painters, when he was at the top of his profession, "Art may seem an easy thing to some people ; but it is so difficult that even the most successful men have felt appalled at the hugeness of their difficulties." I think that Sir John Millais alluded at the time to technical difficulties only. He left

Art Education

on one side Inspiration, without which Art is valueless, and that the best of beauty is a finer charm than the best rules of Art can ever teach.

In proportion to the undoubted progress in some directions, so, I fear, is the tide far slower set towards the best and highest aims, towards that patient following of Nature for love of Nature's truth, which for every student should be the mark they want to hit. We hear a little too much in these days of a word which formerly was hardly in being in the sense in which it is now so constantly used. I mean the word "effect," in relation to the impression produced by some school of painting in fashion at the moment. It means that the drawing is done in the manner of the French Impressionists, or any other school, rather than giving the true "effect" of Nature. There is no kind of merit in an effect of the sort. Turner never tried for that; nor Claude, nor Poussin, nor any of the best Old Masters.

Work achieved by trying to represent (not *imitate*—there is a difference) the charm of some aspect of Nature, to embody some beautiful thought, must at all times be more plain, more legible, so to speak, than that which nowadays so often contents the artist, namely, a strange or even a blank "effect."

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

For painting should always be the universal language. It speaks a language which all can understand. All Nature is creation's picture-book. Painting only can describe everything that can be seen by the eye. "Art reaches back to the babyhood of time; it is man's only lasting monument." The Impressionists have made a strong impression (I mean no pun) on the work of a large proportion of English artists. The works of most of them I do not profess to understand; but I think in them we are meant to believe that a muddle of nothing looks like something! None would deny that it is most useful to make a habit of putting down, with brush or chalk or anything at hand, a note or first quick impression of it may be a group of trees, or a turn in the road, or a passing figure, or whatever may strike you—or rather I would say whatever you feel you *must* paint—say, on looking out of the window. But to create a picture that first impression should surely be afterwards delicately worked out in parts, in order to give strength and substance and a sense of sincerest truth to the whole. It is an insult to the spectator's intelligence to be told, for instance, that a clever smudge of dark upon dirty white is "a windy heath," or that a patch of bald crude green, with a

Art Education

greyish object in the midst, is meant for "an apple-tree in grass." Yet one has seen crude daubs bearing such-like titles honourably hung even in the Royal Academy at Burlington House—an institution, by the way, which seems to be so fast becoming little else save a vain show of all that is false in feeling and in colour, of a multitude of canvases which (with a few fine exceptions) give pleasure to none—which seem hung there upon the walls solely to make the vulgar stare. There must then, I suppose, exist some points of hidden excellence in such works, points unperceived by those who, like myself, don't understand.

I am sure you know well that no picture, whether of landscape or figure, can bear a resemblance to Nature, unless the values—or masses of light and shade—are understood and felt. In "up-to-date" Art we often look in vain for these values; they are entirely missed out. Flatness is to be obtained at all costs, while light and shade are dispensed with. There was once a simple old maxim (I have not heard it for many a day), "Light against dark; dark against light." But now it is quite usual to leave out the shadows altogether; to paint shadowless white figures against white backgrounds, &c., forgetting that there is

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

but one way to make light—"have darkness to make it on." It is a false tendency to translate natural objects as uniformly shadowless. I must now confess, that after I had promised to meet the School of Art this evening, I thought it prudent to arm myself for the occasion with somewhat useful to say. So I went up to London to see some new pictures, and three galleries (1899) were inspected: "The British Artists," "The New English Art Club," and "The Arts and Crafts." The first has indeed been rightly named "A wilderness of paint and wasted effort." Ideal subjects swarm throughout the "wilderness" in dreariest succession; in them nothing is found of a ruling and master quality which may appeal to the imagination. They are not even fantastic; only tiresome. . . . And I cannot think of anything more to say about the "British Artists." At the "New English Art Club" one was not tempted to linger long—I at least did not feel like it! Though the collection is very small, it is large enough to bewilder the uninitiated. The infinite enigma (to a true painter) of sunlight is there supposed to be solved by a dazzle of paint without luminousness. Flesh-tints are done in blueish-blackish or brownish-yellowish. It is an exhibition made up of

Art Education

garish eccentricity. It is "New English Art" all round. For these New Artists seem to *see* in every colour except the pure crystalline of natural atmosphere. Next in order came the "Arts and Crafts." This proved full of interest, at least so far as the needle-work, or embroidery, and actual handicraft are concerned. It appeared to me, however, as a whole, profoundly joyless. Dull, lifeless figures done in coloured plaster, or traced in charcoal, or painted on canvas, almost every one a reminiscence of Burne-Jones, saddened the gallery walls. Over the entrance door might well be inscribed, "Here learn the Art of Melancholy"; for whether they dance, or flute, or clasp hands with winged genii on the seashore—all these pictured people alike wear—if nothing else!—the same sad livery of woe. The very youngest is old and worn, even while piping tunes amid wreaths of flowers. The disciples of a celebrated Master will always unconsciously seize and make their own his weakest points, being the easiest to reach. The powerful influence of Sir Edward Burne-Jones would thus account for the "Arts and Crafts'" prevailing type of hopelessness. The reason, however, is far to seek why Art—whose very existence is solely to give pleasure—why it ever should be sad. Beau-

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

tifully designed jewels and metal work, as shown in the glass cases, helped that day to relieve my deep depression. This tour of the galleries at an end, the conclusion in my own mind was this:—That a good honest study, if nothing more than a copy in black and white of an architectural ornament, when carried out with breadth and freedom and fidelity, is worth all the so-called Idealisms of Modern Art; at least, so far as displayed in those galleries which the other day I visited. After all, there is more to be learnt from "The Life of Sir John Millais" than from many exhibitions. By that memoir we learn to know the prolonged struggle he endured against the most determined opposition, until he became the acknowledged head of his profession. We read the history of the man with the great heart and the clear, deep-seeing eye, true from first to last to the one ideal of his life; "for he loved and worshipped Nature rather than painting." Genius, like Millais's, is born only with the few. Yet it lies within the grasp of all to cultivate, to bring to greater perfection than perhaps they believe, habits of seeing, of observation, of acquiring the power to perceive more and more of beauty in their commonest every-day surroundings. Everybody does not in this

Art Education

sense possess the eye that sees, or the heart that enjoys, or the retentive memory; but everybody can exercise and can intensify with practice the faculties with which he is endued. And as for the fairest scenes of Nature, her hills, and woods, and clear waters and cloud-wrought skies—the exquisite tracery of December's leafless trees, or sunlight playing upon the leaves in summer—beautiful sights like these we should never part from. We should remember them, and so should try to make them our own that they might come out in a hundred ways in our life, and pass into our Art, and be to us, in another sense, as to Nature's child of the fells and waterfalls, when Wordsworth wrote "and beauty, born of murmuring sound, shall pass into her face."

Referring back for a moment to modern changes, and chiefly to changes in technical methods, there is a new one just made known to me; new to me, though very likely old to you. It would seem but a trifling change, yet I have thought it may not be without a certain significance. I was watching the other day a young student copying a bunch of winter red China-roses. The buds and long sprays would in my time have cost an infinity of trouble, first to outline them in the white paper, and then to fill in the

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

background, in and out of the stalks, &c. In place of all this worry the process was reversed. A plain dark ground was boldly washed in first, and then the buds and flowers carefully dabbed out and coloured. What hours of heart-break over those *grounds* and outlines might not have been spared us had we only known, in years gone by! Yet it is not alone the saving of trouble and labour I am now thinking of. There seems to me in this new method the hint, as of a door set ajar, which, when wider opened, shall lead to a new era in Art; lead, perchance, to something new in painting, which our Age is now only blindly groping after. Something not better than the old, but entirely different, witnessing to the truth of Bacon's aphorism, that "things which have never yet been done cannot be accomplished except by means not yet tried." Towards an end like this even the extravagances of "New English Art" might almost be forgiven. With an onlook such as this in front, students should be inspired with renewed energy. With all the modern appliances to help them, the unnumbered aids at hand, the sound teaching, and, to name no higher intention, the increasing demand for *hand-painting* (that particularly odious expression of the day), they ought to

Art Education

be inspired with fresh vigour, fresh courage, to press forward and improve ; to work with still greater earnestness and confidence, remembering meanwhile—

“ . . . to obey
Their mother Nature, safest, best of guides ;
Enduring fame is won by steps, not strides.
She tells us when to sow and when to reap,
When it is time to wake, and when to sleep.”

Wiser counsel in all its simplicity none could surely offer you—Art and Nature go always hand in hand. And trust me, I who have already lived a long life in closest converse with one and the other, can assure you frankly that the longest of days need never be dull or tedious to the true artist. To one whose Art, of whatever kind, is a reality in his life, the joy of work will light up the gloomiest hour. He will draw—whether with pen or pencil or sculptor’s chisel—will draw the thing as he sees it, and will keep in mind the bearing of his Art on all he sees. While, as for Nature, this world would indeed be a happier world could each one in their separate way prove the refreshment of Nature’s companionship. Could they but learn for themselves how “Nature never did betray the heart that loved her.”

I am afraid you will think that over a hundred miles was a long way for me to

The Peacock's Pleasaunce

come and to bring you only so slight a sketch. I am sure, however, that you will kindly take it for what it is worth, though it be nothing better than a tiny stone cut from the great quarry.

In conclusion I would have you lay hold of and take to your heart the knowledge that the office of Art is to educate the perception of beauty. To take for yourself, in your life as in your Art, the motto of the threefold cord of love—the love of Truth, the love of Good, the love of Beauty.

Remember, too, that pictures should never be too picturesque. A man who knew what he was saying (R. Waldo Emerson) writes in one of his essays, "Nothing astonishes men so much as common sense and plain dealing. A dog drawn by a true artist satisfies and is a reality, not less than the frescoes of Michael Angelo."

THE END

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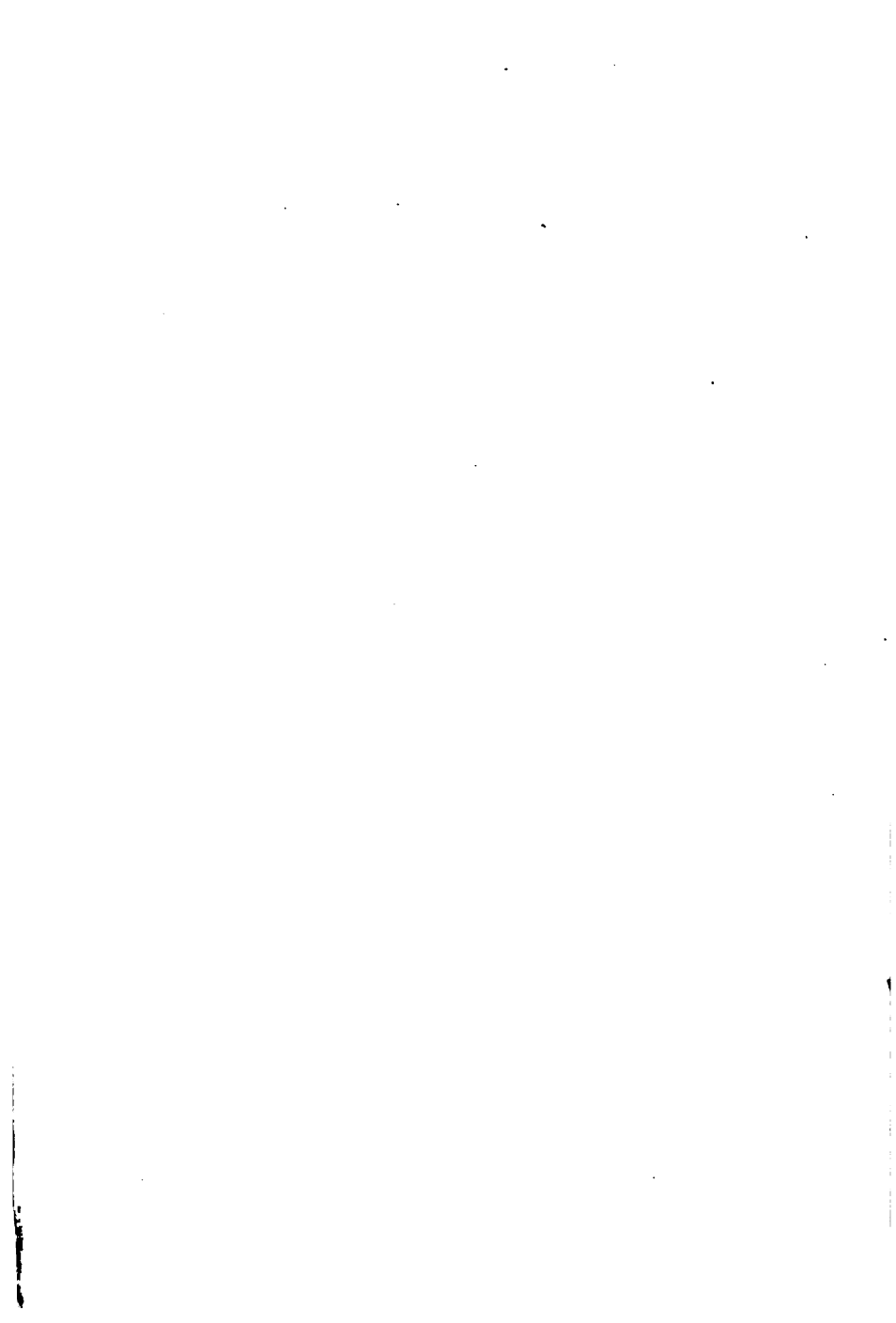
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